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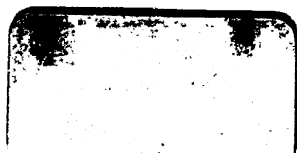
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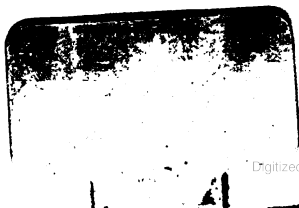


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Yule Log
De Ole Ox Kyart
Wuz Santa Claus a Nigger dat Year?
De Bridegroom
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Amelia Corbell Dickett

YULE LOG

BY

LASALLE CORBELL PICKETT

[MRS. GENERAL GEORGE E. PICKETT]

Author of "Pickett and His Men," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

M. MUEDEN

In the Mix Series—Volume II

Washington

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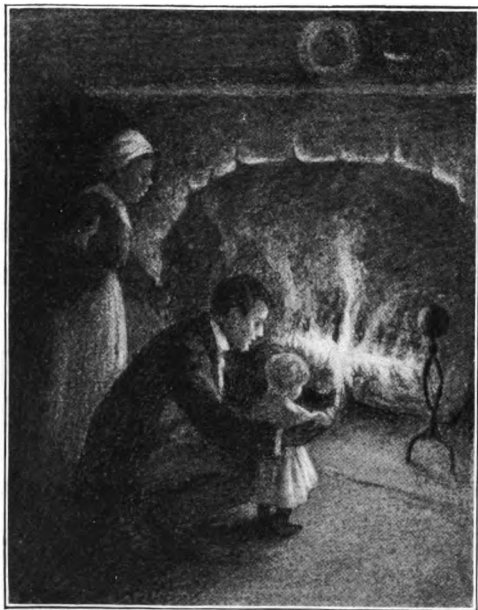
To my Father and Mother

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"'Twel hit kindlelighted hitse'f inter de shape er a cross."

YULE LOG

YULE LOG.

WITH the passing away of the olden *régime* and the dawning of the new day of business enterprise in the Southland many beautiful things have been lost in the dim past.

The oft-repeated phrase, "Before the war," brings back pictures far brighter than any which the newer time has ever hung upon the walls of Memory. The reminiscence of the far-away life lingers with us like the fragrance of the snowy magnolias.

The rose-vines which once trailed over the walls of the old plantation home yet creep through the lattice of the heart and sparkle in the dews of life's early morning.

When "the bells across the snow" ring out the holy chime of "Peace on earth, good will to men," the heart of the traveler turns back to the home of his childhood where those bells first made music in his faith-abiding soul. Whether that never-forgotten spot be amid the darksome pines of the North, the flowering myrtles of the South, beyond the towering mountains of the West, or across the seas that must ever roll between the wanderer and that magic fairy-land of home, the musical chimes ring back to the olden, happy days.

In the Southern heart the sacred Christmas-tide is linked with memories of the old-time plantation, the merry-making of the affectionate, simple-hearted colored people to whom the Christmas holidays were the great festival of the year, the gratitude which lit up their dusky faces as they received their presents, the joy of the pickaninies in the possession of their new toys. Time has no power to remove those pictures from the gallery of the heart.

Thus good old Jack, returning, after years of absence, to the war-desolated home of his youth, describes the old plantation Yule log, with its mystic blaze flaming out in response to the cheerful note of the Yule log horn :

“I kin shet my eyes en open my mouf now, en see dat ole Chris’mus-Ebe

Yule log kindlelightin' jes' lak as ef hit wuz yistiddy. Yas, suh, I kin see hit all now, eben dough de drawin'-room winders is shet up tight, en dough de drawin'-room hitse'f is ez dark ez pitch, en dough, too, I reckon de las' yeah's birdnes'es en las' summer's li'l' naked, bal'-haided chimbly-swallows is all a layin' on de ole harf-stones in de fiahplace. Yas, dar li'l' corpses, I 'speck, is a layin' ret dar whar de Yule log use' ter lay. En dough, too, de Marser is daid, daid en bur'ed,—kilt up dar at Gettysburg a foughten'long Marse Gin'ul Pickett,—en dough all de res' er our folks is—Gord-er-Moughty knows whar.

“But jes' de same, I 'members how hit all use' ter be in de ole, ole times 'fo' de war. I 'members how de Marser

would blow de Yule log horn fer all han's ter 'semble at de wood-pile, en how we'd tek off en run jes' ez fas' ez our laigs could kyar us ter see w'ich could git dar firs', en how we'd grab up de chips en de wood en t'ings en tote 'em in fer de Yule log fiah, a snatchin' 'em out er wunner-nudder's han's, en a fallin' ober en a runnin' inter wunner-nudder.

"I 'members how dey all use' ter pile de small-size hick'ry logs en chips en bark en corn-cobs up on top er de big brass dog-i'ons—pile 'em all up jes' ez high ez dey could pile 'em ; en I kin see dat ole ser'us lookin' Yule log a layin' back dar behime hit all, jes' lak hit had folks' thoughts in hit. I 'members how we'd chink de lighted splinters inter all de spyar cracks'twix'

en 'tween de diff'unt li'l' logs dat wuz behime en 'roun' en un'neaf de big ole Yule log. En den w'en we wuz thoo, en hit wuz all raidy, en de kindle-lightin' time had come, how ole granny would go out en fetch in de younges' chile on de plantation,—w'edder hit wuz a w'ite chile er w'edder hit wuz a brack chile,—fetch hit ter tetch off de splinters wid a holy candle. En de chile would tetch hit off yer, en tetch hit off dar, 'twel hit kindlelighted hitse'f inter de shape er de cross. Co'se de Marser hilt de chile's han' en guided hit de way ter de cross.

“We wuz all stan'in' 'roun' a watchin' de cross—watchin' de flames er de cross spread en chase atter wunner-nudder, a crawlin' en a creepin' in en out, en 'roun'-en-'bout, a skaddlin' yer

en a skaddlin' dar, a lippin' up higher
en higher. Firs' a li'l' blue blaze
would come, den a yaller one, den a
bret red one would flar' up; en den de
blazes would all mingulate darse'fs
tergedder—red en blue en yaller en
w'ite—en would all mix up wid de
kindleashun colors er de rainbow, en
crackle en crackle, en lip higher
en higher, en bigger en bigger, de
crackles a gittin' louder en louder,
en de blazes a gittin' bigger en bigger,
'twel de light er de cross had tetched
ag'inst en cotch afiah ebby chink en
meked hit look lak de scandescen'
light in de Bible had come down de
chimbly.

“De chillun all clappin' dar han's
en a hollerin' en a laffin', de babies
op'nin' dar eyes en skroochin' darse'fs

up close ter dar mudders en clutchin' holt er 'em wid bofe er dar li'l' fis'es.

"De young folks all a lookin' sideways at wunner-nudder en a cooin' wid dar eyes, en talkin' soff talk in de shadder, en a seein' pickchers in de flames, en a mekin' wishes en a tellin' forchunes wid apple seeds.

"De ole folks a talkin' 'bout how dey done w'en dey wuz young en 'bout de craps en 'ligeon en de wedder en cancers en ghos'es en w'ats good fer chills-en-agers en bunjuns.

"Deniggers,—dey all a-t'inkin' 'bout w'at dey wuz gwine ter git fer Chris'mus en 'bout dem roas'in' pigs dey done en kilt en hong up raidy fer ter roas' on de spit, en de cakes en all dem yudder good t'ings whar wuz done en beked en put away in de safe.

“But ebby las’ one er ’em, young en ole, en brack en w’ite, li’l’ en big, no matter w’at dey wuz a t’inkin’ er doin’, a watchin’ de diff’unt kindleashuns er de yaller flames wid dar blue aidges en red streaks, a dartin’ in en out, in en out—a hissin’ en a poppin’ en a crackin’, all streaked en striked, en flamin’ en flarin’, lippin’ up en mekin’ mo’ new sparks, en ketchin’ holt er mo’ new blazes ebby minit, ’twel all de li’l’ logs en all de kindlin’ en light’ood is tu’nt ter coals er fiah en nuttin’ is lef’ but de big ole Yule log.

“En dat faifful ole Yule log; dat knotty, tough ole brack-Jack lays dar bertwix’ de two jambs, a smoulderin’ en a smoulderin’ away wid hit’s heart true ter Chris’mus, a darin’ en a defyin’

all de flames er de bark, en de splinters
en all de li'l' logs put tergedder ter
mek hit bu'n out, ef dey could,
endurin' de time dat Chris'mus las's.

"Ole Missis (Marse Gin'ul Pickett's
ma) use' ter say dat dem sparks er de
Yule log wuz de li'l' splinters dat
splunt off de Star in de East dat time
at Beflehem w'en all ter a sudden de
Star come ter a stop-still ter show de
wise mens Him whar come ter sabe'em.
En de ser'us ole Yule log lays dar, a
smoulderin' en a smoulderin' all thoo
de whole er de Chris'mus times, en a
shroudin' wid hit's w'ite ashes hit's
own gre't, 'roun', red, glowin' heart—
dat heart er fiah dat's allers true ter
Chris'mus.

"I kin shet my ole eyes en look
'twix' dar 'hin'-sights en see fallin'

swiff en soff fum dat bu'nin' heart
er de Yule log, millions en millions
er li'l' w'ite shrouds,—Marse Gin'ul
Pickett's ma said dat dey wuz de
shrouds er de los' seconds er de ole
yeah, gone ferebbermo'. Widout no
noise, deze li'l' w'ite lacy specks er
shrouds draps, draps, draps, 'twel
de las' dinge-e-e er de ole yeah's bell
en de midnight crow er de hoarse ole
rooster is hubbubbed tergedder in de
shriels en peals er de cheers, en de
hawnserdenew-bawn yeah. Dende ole
faifful Yule log, wid hit's heart bu'nt
out fer Chris'mus, trombles en crum-
bles, 'twel hit's heart-meked shroud—
a han'ful er w'ite ashes—is all dat is
lef' er hit. But hit's heart wuz true
ter Chris'mus."



"'It is I; be not afeard,' en de fo'-finger done de las ack."

”

DE OLE OX KYART

“COME ’way fum dat kyart ’fo’ dem
steers hooks you wide open er tromples
you ter def, wun er de yudder, you
year! Granny, you better call deze
yer chillun ’way ef you don’ want
some ef ole Missis’ prop’ty ter git kilt,
en Patsy, you better g’long back ter
de gre’t house wid li’l’ Missis, too,
fer deze yer Chris’mus t’ings is all
nailt up, en yer’s a paper fum Marse
Santa Claus wid strick onstructions
dat all deze Chris’mus doin’s is ter be
sot away in de sto’-house ’twel he
comes hisse’f Chris’mus Ebe’s night,

en dat ef a libin' soul ez much ez totches wun er de boxes er peeps thoo de cracks, er eben down ter queshuns 'bout w'at's insides any er 'em, dat all de t'ings will tu'n fum w'atsumeber dey is ter ashes en sin-duzes en dar won' be nuttin' fer nobody w'en Chris'mus comes sho-nuff."

This alleged threat of Santa Claus, which was only the bill of lading, that Uncle Charles, my grandmother's foreman, took out of his hat and tragically unfolded and waved at us with one hand while with the other he fiercely grasped the steer yoke, was more potent by far than the fear of being "hooked er trompled ter def," so we slunk away and contented ourselves watching with wonder-eyes from our respective distances.

I, with my face pressed against the window-pane in my nursery, could see the unloading, and see, too, the little colored children all huddled up together on the door-steps of the quarter-kitchen, pulling down each other's heads and whispering mysteriously into each other's ears as the boxes and barrels, one after the other, were taken out and stored away. There was the hogshead of New Orleans molasses, suggesting the thick layer of sugar at the bottom ; the long, peaked loaves of white sugar under their thick blue "fools-caps," the cases of raisins and figs and dates and tamarinds, and barrels of nuts and oranges and crackers, and boxes of cheese, and slyly pushed back behind them were hampers with the mysterious name of

"sundries," which name we at once associated with Santa Claus.

We all loved and feared Uncle Charles, who seemed to us the viceroy and confidential agent of the king of childhood, Santa Claus. To the deft fingers of his wife, Mammy Borry, we owed many of our daintily-trimmed gowns of drawn work and lace.

"Bofe my names is nicknames, honey," Uncle Charles' wife would say. "W'en yo' Ung' Charles firs' foun' me I wuz insides a gre't big hornet's nes'. Whosomeber lef' me in de woods in dat hornet's nes' had a heap er goodness in dar hearts, fer dey pulled de soff, warm hornet's nes' open en put me in de nice, comf'ble middle part. Dey all named me Nettie atter de hornet's nes'. Den w'en

my li'l' boy die (dey named 'im Horner atter dat same hornet's nes') dey called me Nettie stret 'long 'twel I tuck ter borr'in' chillun ter keep my heart easy 'count er de def er li'l' Horner, den dey gin me de name er Mammy Borry.

"I nebber knowed nuttin' 'tall 'bout no daddy ner mammy ner br'er ner sister myse'f. Yo' Ung' Charles is all de fader—all de kinlashuns I ebber had. W'en he foun' me he tuck me en de hornet's nes' en tuck off his jacket en wropped hit 'roun' us bofe en brung us 'long home ter ole Missis en say :

" 'I foun' dis yer in de woods, Missis—en 'tain't no rabbit ner squir'l dis time, 'tain't no kin' er varment. Hit's sump'n dat's too dark skinned en

diff'unt ter be a buckra en too bret
skin ter be a nigger, en dar ain't a
smitch er merlater look, needer, 'bout
hit. All I knows is dat hit's a li'l'
gal-chile en dat hit's moughty weak
en hongry, en yer 'tis, Missis. I gibs
hit ter you fer a keepsek 'twel you
fin's de owner. Mebbe you mought
fetch hit up by han', en bimeby mebbe
hit kin pay you back fer all de trouble
a huntin' hen's-n'es en pickin' up
chips fer you. I'll wait fer my jacket
'twel you kin wrop a blanket 'roun'
hit.'

"Didn' nobody know w'edder I wuz
free bawn or bon' bawn, so dey thunk
dey bes' git outn free papers fer me.
Yo' Ung' Charles tuck 'session er my
feebleness fum de firs', en he allers
he'ped me ter git ober de bad places.

I knowed I wuz his'n, en one day atter I wuz growed ter be a ooman I yeard he lak ter a got drowneded pro-jeckin' wid dem wile oxens, a dribin' 'em too fur in de fo'd in a flush. So I went ter 'im en 'seeched 'im, please, suh, not ter dar'debil en be wenture-some wid dem 'stracted-minded oxens, en he say :

“ ‘G'long in de house, gal, you don' keer ef I duz git kilt er drowneded na'r one, fer dey tells me you gwine marry Cæsur Bailey.’

“ I say :

“ ‘Ung' Charles, I ain't gwine marry nobody widout you'll hab me.’

“ Den he say :

“ ‘Nettie, ef dat's de trufe, gal, I promise you I'll be mo' keerful wid dem oxens.’

“Twa’n’t long atter dis ’fo’ yo’
‘Ung’ Charles en me wuz mar’ed—de
owner done foun’ me.”

The blowing of horns and popping of fire-crackers had made Christmas many hours old when I was aroused by a loving Christmas-gift kiss, and, looking up, saw the beautiful face of my grandmother bending over me. Rubbing my eyes awake I saw her holding out toward me a beautiful wadded dressing gown of blue and pink silk, and a pair of warm worsted boots, her Christmas present for me. Putting on the boots and slipping the wrapper over my night gown, she gave me a cup of hot milk to drink, then pushing back my curls led me to the folding doors, which at her touch opened wide. Was there ever before

so weird and beautiful a picture colored on a little child's heart?

Up in the top of a glittering Christmas tree laden with presents for all was a great white-bearded Santa Claus, and around about it the little negroes of the plantation were gracefully grouped. On one of the branches in a nest of soft white cotton was a little colored baby six weeks old, unconsciously holding in its chubby black fist a deed which made him mine—a Christmas present which “de angels had sont me by Marse Santa Claus, fer my coachmans,” my mammy told me.

At a signal from my dear black mammy all the little ones courtesied or bowed and cried out: “Chris’mus gif’! Merry Chris’mus en Chris’mus

gif', ole Missis, li'l' Missis, en ebby-body !'' Then Santa Claus handed down the dolls, horns, toys, candies and bags of marbles to each in turn. After all had been distributed "Kriss," the baby, was taken out of his nest and I was awarded the great privilege of holding him in my lap on condition that I would sit flat on the floor, an honor which Kriss, who was thus summarily awakened from his slumber, did not appreciate. "Dat's his way er axin' you Chris'mus gif', my mammy apologetically explained, as she took him from me.

"G'long now, chillun, all han's er you, ter de quarters en habe yo'se'fs; 'member who meked you en don' disqualify 'g'inst de job; put all yo' 'memb'unce en all yo' 'pendunce in

whose buf-day 'tis, en don' drap nuttin' on yo' new cloze ner bre'k up yo' t'ings, en don' le' me year no jowerin' fum none er you. En you tek dat no-mannered baby Kris'fer K'lumbus, en gib' 'im sump'n ter eat, en don' let 'im cotch cole. En don' you let none deze yer chillun see you, you ole Santa Claus, you, 'twel you change dem cloze en git all dat flour dough offn you. En you come 'long wid yo' mammy, honey, en let her comb yo' hyar lak a li'l' lady."

The mother of Kriss, my Christmas gift, did not like children, and was in the habit of lending out all of hers as soon as they were six months old to those of her associates who were blessed with motherly instincts and were on the borrow. Uncle Charles'

wife, who had borrowed and reared twenty-seven children, had already bespoken little Kriss.

"I wuz a borrowed baby myse'f," she explained, "en I's tryin' ter pay back de borrr'in' ez well ez tryin' ter season my heart ter de def' er my li'l' Horner."

Later my dear grandmother, in the old basement dining-room, standing beside a large many-gallon bowl of egg-nogg, a silver ladle in her pink and white hands, filled up glass after glass of the delicious white beverage for one and all. Even the babies drank egg-nogg on Christmas morning in old Virginia. All above and around the big brick fireplace, in which a bright log fire burned and crackled, hung stockings and socks of all sizes

filled "wid Chris'mus gif's w'at Marse Santa 'ad fotch down de chimbly." Uncle Charles stood on a stool to reach and hand them down. The first one was "a possum fer ole Missis," the next "a coon-skin fer li'l' Missis fer ter kiver ober her doll-babies' flo' wid." Then as he took the others down he would sing out, "Chris'mus gif', yer's yo' sock! Who got de mate? Chris'-mus gif'! Who got de feller ter dis one? Chris'mus gif'! 'Dentify dis stockin' wid hits match!" and so on till the last sock was mated and taken down, the last "thankee, suh," and "Chris'mus gif' back ag'in" had been said. Our good old black daddy rolled up his eyes, wiped his shining bald head and, suddenly changing his gleeful Christmas tone and expression

to his stern and solemn preacher manner, said :

“ ‘Fo’ you all goes I wants ter ‘zort a few words ter you ; so stop yo’ hop-pin’ up en down lak you been drinkin’ ole Missis’ caper sauce, en stop crack-in’ dem nuts en chompin’ dat candy, dough I ‘low dat dis is a day fer eatin’. But, den, w’y is hit a eatin’ day? I ax you all dat. W’y does you sabe yo’ ‘possum (don’ keer ef you kotch dat ‘possum a munf ago) ‘twel terday, en w’y, w’y does you hab a pot er hog en hom’ny, no matter w’atsumeber else you got? W’y? Hit’s kaze Marse Jesus, de bressed Lawd’s onlies’ chile, wuz bawn on dis day mo’ dan a hundud yeahs ago. Dat’s de ‘kazhun er all de big doin’s ebbywhar in de lan’. Dar wuz gre’t times yer on de

ye'th en in de elerments, too, endurin' dat day. De good Book 'lowed dat eben down ter de styars got a mobe on 'em, so w'ile you-all's stuffin' yo'se'fs don' fergit 'boutn de glorifikashun dat b'longs ter de day.

“'Pent er yo' sins ; juk up en jump w'en you spoken ter; don' go ter balk-in'. 'Member Ebe; she balk en mek a halt, en she tu'nt ter salt. Lub wunner-nudder ef you kin, en don' be stingy. 'Wide w'at you got wid wunner-nudder. 'Member de widow Crews; she didn' hab nuttin' in de worl' but a ile-jug, en she gin dat away ter de po'. 'Member, too, dat de same li'l' baby dat wuz bawn terday growed up ter rent de bars in twain en ter suffer en die ter perdeem yo' souls fum hell-fiah en brimstone. Wek up dar, nig-

gers! Dis mawnin' mus' er got up too soon fer you.

"De bressed Sabyer is growed up now ter be gre't en stronagin, en you mus' lub en fear 'Im. Yes; be skeered ter def, fer dat is one er His stronaginst reman'ments. En you better be skeered, too, fer He is dat big He kin hole ebby one er we-all in de holler er one han'.

"De good Lawd ain't nebber had but jes' dat one chile. Ef He had er had mo' chillun den 'co'se dar wu'd er 'bleeged ter been mo' Chris'musses. 'Member w'at I say, now—don' comb yo' huids uver night; ef you do you'll fergit yo' reckerlackshun en nebber 'member nuttin' no mo'. Amen, — A-M-E-N!" And Uncle Charles rolled down his eyeballs and waved the dismissal of his impatient listeners.

The old-time Christmas of the plantation has passed away with the old Southern homes and the old Southern life. The Christmas sermon of good old "Uncle Charles" is now but a cherished memory in the hearts of the grave and saddened men and women who, as children, used to listen with awe-struck minds to his solemn exhortations. The war soon came to sweep master and slave alike into a freedom which is thus commented upon by Mammy Borry :

"My ole man is gittin' too ole ter be a gee-in' en a haw-in' lak he is, but 'pear lak hit's moughly hard fer 'im ter gib up breckin' in de oxens. He allers wuz so proud er his ox-teams, en proud er his ox-kyarts, too, fer he use' ter stan' ter hit dat a ox-kyart wuz

de kingdomes', soshubles', roomies' chariotable ebber rid in, en he nebber wuz ez happy ez when he wuz a gee-hawin' a load er de nayberhood gals ter a ball er ter a camp-meetin', en hit mos' bruck his heart ter come down ter one steer en a single steer kyart; but dat's freedom. We won' nebber see de ole times no mo'. My ole man done dribe his las' yoke er oxens—done rid in his las' ox-kyart, fer dey done en eben got a new hearse up at de village, en dey don' put de curtains on de ox-kyarts no mo' now, ner hitch de brack hosses ter hit lak dey use' ter fer ter dribe de corpses, kaze de hearse is meked now fer de puppose er ridin' all de daid."

Aunt Nettie, or Mammy Borry, for we always called her by her child-

borrowing name, lived nearly two years after the war ; as she said, lived "ter hab a breas' full er griefs en restresses, libed ter moan ober de trans-greshuns en ondoin's er all de borrowed chillun whar I brung up. De Lawd suttinly knowed w'at wuz bes' fer me w'en He tuck my li'l' Horner ter glory, en I praises His Holy Name dat He didn' gib me no mo' natchul-bawn chillun en dat He meked hit so I wuz 'bleeged ter borry, kaze de 'memb'unce er de 'sponsibility er de borryed chillun is ez much 'sponsibility ez I could byar, en sometimes I wishes I'd gone ter de Fader's man-shun 'fo' de war.

"Po' Marser ! I t'inks 'bout 'im a heap, en I suttinly does wish he could a libed ter a had his freedom, too, kaze

ef dar ebber wuz a slabe 'twuz Marser, fer his niggers sho'ly did own him."

During the last year of Mammy Borry's life she was a great invalid, and night after night would think her "time had come" and send Uncle Charles post-haste over "ter de gre't house fer ole Missis ter come en read de Bible ter her en see her gib up de ghos'."

"My ole ooman suttinly do hole her own, praise de Lawd! En 'deed hit's de trufe, Missis, but dis yer fo'-finger er mine is mos' got stiff-j'inted keepin' hit out so stret off en on endurin' dis las' yeah lak I has, so dat I could be raidy ter close my ole ooman's eyes w'en her time comes," said Uncle Charles one night as he was piloting "ole Missis" across the yard from

"de gre't house ter Mammy Borry's cabin."

"You would better shut your finger up then," suggested his mistress, "and not be in such a hurry to speed the parting soul of your poor little wife."

"I ain't in no hurry, Missis," he replied, "but I'm aimin' ter be raidy fer de een', kaze I ain't gwine let nobody else do de las' ack fer my ole ooman."

So night after night Uncle Charles would stand at the head of Mammy Borry's bed with his outstretched forefinger pointed at her eyes, watching the dying face, ready "ter do de las' ack fer her," while "ole Missis" would sit by her side and read about the loaves and the fishes, her favorite of all the chapters in the Bible.

One night during the Christmas of 1866 Uncle Charles tapped gently at "ole Missis' " door and said :

"Missis! Missis! I b'leebe my ole ooman's time done come en de fo'-finger gwine ter git hit's job ter-night. Co'se she may pull thoo, kaze she done had so many bad turns en git ober 'em ag'in; but ter-night her woice soun' lak hit use'ter soun' w'en she wuz my li'l' Nettie-gal. I wuz fas' asleep en I year'd sump'n say: 'Challey-boy! Challey-boy!' I thunk firs' I mus' er dremp' dat soun', fer I ain't year'd dat name 'fo' fer mo' dan fifty yeahs, en I lis'en good en pres'n'y I year'd hit ag'in—'Challey-boy!' I got up quick den en lit de candle en hilt hit down close 'long side er my ole ooman's face en look at her. But

twan't my ole ooman's face, dough,
'twuz my li'l' Nettie-gal's face; en
don' you know, Missis, all de red-brown
ginger-bre'd color had done en come
back inter hit jes' lak hit use' ter be,
en her eyes wuz shinin' en she smile
up at me jes' lak she use' ter smile,
en riz up her chin dat ole-time way
lak she 'speck me ter chuck her
un'neaf hit lak I use' ter in de ole
days done gone, but I knowed
'twan't ret fer no ole rough, crusty,
wicked nigger ter tetch dat speritchual
face. Den she call de ole name
ag'in, en say: 'Go, Challey-boy, go
en tell ole Missis ter come 'long; dat
I's raidy fer de messidge.' I know
my ole ooman is ret, too, kaze I yeard
de dog howlin' un'neaf de back poach
ez I come 'long out de do'."

Uncle Charles was right. He afterward finished the story thus :

“Soon ez ebber we wuz inside de room Mammy Borry say : ‘Missis, gib me de messidge fer de Marser, quick, kaze I done ’ceibe my summons en I knows dat de ve’y minit Marser sets his two eyes ’pon me he gwine say : “Mammy Borry, how did you leabe yo’ Missis?” en den he gwine ax me : “Didn’ she sont me her lub en sont me some wud by you?” So, Missis, I wants you ter gib me a nice, lubbin’ messidge fer me ter kyar ter Marser. Den I wants you, please, Marm, ter read me ’boutn dem loabes en fishes ag’in.

“ ‘I wants you ter promise me, Challey-boy, ’fo’ I goes, not ter gee ner haw de ole steer no mo’ dan you kin he’p, en won’ you please retch up dar en

han' me down Horner's li'l' britches outn dat box. En, Challey-boy, tek keer er yo'se'f.'

"Dem li'l' britches my li'l' Nettiegal wuz 'ferrin' ter wuz our onlies' chile's firs' li'l' britches, but he die wid de measles 'fo' he ebber wored 'em. Co'se de britches ain't gwine fit Horner now, kaze he mus' er growed a heap sence den, but Nettie mought ez well kyar 'em 'long wid her, fer dey ain't gwine be no use ter me.

"De Missis gin Nettie de messidge fer Marser, den she wipe her eyes en lay her li'l' soff w'ite han' on Nettie's, lubbin' en tender. Den she open de Bible en read how Jesus went fofe en saw de multichude en healt de sick en walked on de sea en ceast de win's, en

jes' ez she read how He said 'Be er
good cheer. It is I. Be not afeared,'
de fo'-finger done de las' ack."



*"I ain't gwine ter aggerwate my stummuck
wid my eyeballs."*

WUZ SANTA CLAUS A NIGGER DAT YEAH?

THE memories of the last olden-time plantation Christmas of my youth spring into bud in my thought through the branching shade of the years, and I let them blossom into words merely as an historical sketch of the times—hoping to please those who, like me, have passed through such scenes, as well as those to whom they are not even the dimmest of reminiscences.

The story of that novel Christmas-tide was enacted at my old Virginia home, near the village of Chuckatuck, in Nansemond County. The ancestral forests of this region had

sheltered the hunting ground of the Nanseum Indians in the days when John Smith came prospecting for a home for his numerous descendants, and from that circumstance he had given the county its name of Nansemond. My home was diagonally opposite Newport News, on a neck of land which separated the Chuckatuck Creek from the Nansemond River. From a point on the strait I witnessed the famous naval engagement between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*.

Ever since the capture of Roanoke Island by the Federals and the abandonment of Norfolk and Suffolk by the Confederates all this part of the country had been in quiet possession of the former. The Confederate lines extended only to the Blackwater River

on the east, where a small force under General Pryor was stationed to hold the Federals in check.

Though the Emancipation Proclamation had not yet been issued the light of Freedom was glimmering like an aurora borealis in the northern sky. The negroes knew that they had only to cross beyond the reach of the power of the Confederacy to throw off forever the shackles which had been riveted upon them by time, custom and tradition. Alluring as was that radiance, it was dimmed almost to obscurity in their loving, loyal hearts, by the darkness of leaving their old homes. Tender memories, ties of affection formed through many years of dependence and protection, trammelled their reluctant feet as they timidly

crossed their Rubicon. The hand of Time had unlocked the floodgates and a river of blood had rolled on and swept away the ancient barriers. Master and servitor alike drifted onward with the tide.

“WELL, dis is Chris’mus ebe’s ebe, demorrer will be Chris’mus ebe, en day atter demorrer Chris’mus day in de mawnin’,” I overheard Aunt Serena saying to herself, though with anything but the wonted Christmas glee in her usually cheery voice, as I went into her kitchen all cleaned and ready for Christmas. The last finishing touches had been given to it and cedar wreaths and bright holly berries picturesquely adorned its whitewashed ceiling.

“Yes, chile, dat’s so; Chris’mus don’ come but woncet a yeah; but I ain’t got no Chris’mus in my bones dis yeah, en my insides ain’t linded wid int’rus’ ner pleger needer, en jes’ now w’en I wuz thoo wid all de wuk en sot down en tuck a intervue er de premusses I ’lowed ter myse’f dat somehow er nudder hit all ’peared ter me mo’ perzackly lak Good Friday dan Chris’mus; en w’en I stunt ’fo’ de safe wid de do’s open, atter I had done ’poz’ted de las’ bakin’ er cakes en saw all dem yudder brack cakes en Chris’mus doin’s sottin’ dar in rows on de she’fs, cas’in’ shadders jes’ lak dey had gumpshun ’nuff inside er ’em ter put on deep mo’nin’ fer all er dem yudder happy Chris’muses dat’s done en gone ferebber mo’, I said ter

myse'f dat ef I didn' know diff'unt I 'ud bleebe Ole Santa Claus wuz a nigger dis yeah fer sho'. Den I shet de safe do' en sot down wid my sperits er swinkin' en my kerrege all oozin'."

Since we had no sugar in Virginia, sorghum, an Asiatic plant with succulent stalks recently introduced into this country, from which we made a syrup, had to serve all its purposes. We ingeniously managed to concoct a great many things out of it that tasted very good to us then, in those war-starving times. With the aid of our native fruits—dried currants, cherries, apples, pears, peaches, figs, whortleberries and citron—we succeeded in making a delicious fruit cake.

The shelves in the old tin safe now were filled with sorghum puddings,

sorghum pies, sorghum cakes and sorghum candies, made into all manner of shapes, some plain and others filled with walnuts, peanuts and hickory nuts. To me, as I remember them all now in the long distance of time, they looked very tempting and inviting, in spite of the uncanny suggestion of a "nigger Santa Claus."

"The hog-killing" (quite an event on a Virginia plantation) had been over with for nearly two weeks, and much of the time since then had been spent by us in preparing and sending off the Christmas boxes for our loved ones across the lines. Besides the many sorghum-made dainties which we put into these boxes, there were sausages and spare-ribs and chines and cheese-souse and pigs' feet, and crackling

bread and chitterlings and turkeys and pickled oysters and baked sweet potatoes (yellow and white yams). All had been lovingly packed and smuggled safely across the Blackwater, upon the opposite banks of which "the Johnny Rebs swapped tobacco for coffee with the Yanks."

"Lis'en at dem niggers singin'," growled Aunt Serena. "Dey ain't had no 'spe'unce, en fer all dey knows triberlation is waitin' fer 'em 'roun' de cornder. Dey's bred en bawn en mos' riz, but dey ain't daid, dough. Sump'n dretful en diserp'intin' mought ober-tek 'em 'fo' de yeah's out, yit."

"Chris'mus comes but oncet a yeah,
En ebby las' nigger has his sheah ;
Rum-stag er Hi-me-ho-me, rinktum er shay !
We's put by de horg-meat en de corn-pone,
En's a greasin' our moufs wid a tuckey bone ;

Rum-stag er Hi-me-ho-me, rinktum er shay!
 We hankers all de yeah fer de Chris'mus times,
 W'en de nigger sheks his cloze en sheds de dimes;
 Rum-stag er Hi-me-ho-me, rinktum er shay!"

By this time their singing had cheered her in spite of herself, and before they had begun this last verse she was standing in the doorway patting time to the music of their voices.

"May we-all look in de safe?" said the twin sisters, Mary Francis and Arabella, as they ran in, followed by the others.

"You-all kin ef you wants ter; but ez fer me, ole ooman, I ain't gwine ter aggerwate my stummuck wid my eye-balls, en I don' want ter look," said Uncle Battus; "kaze I's feared I 'ud chomp my toofs in dem puddin's 'fo' I knowed w'at I wuz doin'."

"Dat'll do ; dat'll do. You done been browzin' 'roun' dat safe long 'nuff. Come 'way fum dar 'fo' de debil temp's you. Den, ag'in, you better put some er yo' tennence on de j'is'," called out Aunt Serena, and immediately they all looked around and then up at the joist, from which, peeping in and out among the evergreens, were the bladders they had blown up "at hog-killing" and hung there to be popped on Christmas Eve.

"Stopdatshekin' yo' toes en crackin' yo' heels tergedder; dem holler berr'es is a drappin' off. I wush you all had some sho-nuff poppers en rockits ter pop, too."

"Nemmine 'bout dat," said Cyrus, "dem bladders 'll mek a noise, anyhow, ef dey don' mek no sparkses ner

fizzin's ner light lak poppers does ; en den Marse Da' says we-alls kin hab dat empty tar bar'l ter sot fiah ter en dat we kin bu'n de lime-kil', too, ef we chooses, en dey bofe tergedder 'll mek light 'nuff fer us, en de bu'stin' er de bladders 'll mek de esplozhuns. En, mammy, I lak ter fergot ter tell you dat Miss Liz' says you mus' 'wide up all dem good t'ings 'tween we-all so we kin hab our sheah demorrer night, 'stead er Chris'mus mawnin' lak we gen'ally does, en I's pow'ful glad, too, fer I ain't nebber imagined in my memb'unce anyt'ing ez skrumpshus ez de 'pearance er dem perwizhuns."

Christmas Eve had come and gone. The stock had been fed early, the cows milked, the supper was over, the

Christmas presents were distributed, the bladders had been popped, and the last flicker of light from the burning lime-kiln and tar barrel had died away. My little brothers and sisters had been put to bed to give Old Santa Claus a chance to come down the chimney with his reindeer, though they had all been told not to expect many things this war Christmas, because poor Santa Claus would have to run the blockade, and could not get through the Federal lines without risking his life in passing "the Yankee sentinels."

"Come," said my father, "it is growing late, and time to lock up and turn in."

"Ebbyt'ing is raidy fer de mawn-in'," said Cæsar, as he hung up the

stable and crib keys, "en demorrer bein' Chris'mus we ain't gwine tu'n out ez soon ; den ag'in, too, dar ain't no 'kazhun fer hit, kaze you-alls done gin us our Chris'mus git's ternight, en dat, too, 'fo' we eben got de chance ter kotch you."

"All right," said my father sadly, and then he called them back and said :

"Do you know why I gave you your Christmas suits and gifts this evening? Well, it is because you are all going to leave your old master's home to-night. I hoped you would come and tell me before you went. Here is a little change for each of you ; Battus will divide it equally, and if you ever need a home come back to this — the one that you and your fathers' fathers before you helped to make."

"I 'clar' 'fo' de Lawd, Marse Da'," said Uncle Battus, "we ain't studd'in' 'bout gwine 'way, is we, boys? W'at does you mean by confabulatin' lak dat? 'Fo' grashus, de suckumstances er my acks don' jestify hit. Does hit, ole ooman? Whar is dat nigger? You bet' not le' me lay my han's on you—allers hidin' yo'se'f w'en you's wanted. I don' know w'at meks my ole ooman so tarnashun cantankerous. She done had cunjer in her eye fer jamby a week now."

"I mean that I have read your minds and that your arrangements are all made to leave to-night. I see that you are feeling very bad over it, and I hoped to the last you would be straightforward and come and tell me, so that you could have packed up and

gone away in the open day and said good-bye honestly instead of sneaking off like this in the night. You know that ever since the evacuation of Norfolk you could have gone at any time you wished and I could not have prevented you. The manner of your going makes it hard to bear for both."

"'Fo' de Lawd, Marse Da', we hain't got no mo' noshun er gwine dan nuttin' in de worl', is we now, ole ooman?—Is we, Freelin'? W'y don' some er you niggers speak out? Is you deaf? De trufe is, Marse Da', we'se upsot 'bout de war; leas'wise dat's w'at's de matter wid me, en de ole ooman's got a toofache; dat's one t'ing dat meks her sich a tarnashun ijutt. I tole her jes' now she wuz gittin' ripe fer de debil wid her con-

founded kantankersomeness. No, Marse Da', we'se gwine stay ret yer 'twel we houses de res' er dis yeah's crap en he'ps plant a nudder one naix' yeah ez ter dat, ef we'se all a libin' en nuttin' happens. We'se much 'bleeged fer de money, but we ain't gwine 'way ; nar, suh, dat we ain't. Whar in de name-er-Gord is dat ole ooman got ter now? Why don' you speak up? Don' bat yo' eyes at me. Ain't you got no tongue?"

"Keep the money, and remember what I have said. Now, good-bye, and don't hurt your souls by any more stories."

"Do not wound their feelings, papa," I plead, "by doubting them," though in my heart I felt his intuitions were correct.

About an hour after this Mary Francis crept slowly to my bedside and put on my finger a little ring that Miss Mary Hutchins had left her as a legacy. There was a doll trunk which I had given her, made of shells, and in it were some little keepsakes very precious to her, which she had stored away from time to time. This she put under my pillow, while a sob escaped her as she stole away, thinking I was asleep, and I would not deceive nor pain her.

A few minutes later Arabella came in and, accidentally stumbling against a chair, said :

“Please, mar'm, li'l' Missis, 'scuze me—I didn' go ter wek you up. I's gwine ter de quarters a li'l' w'ile wid dey-all, en, li'l' Missis, you knows

Bill? Well, I jamby meked 'im wuk hisse'f ter def gittin' up light'ood fer you. You know, li'l' Missis, Bill wants me ter hab 'im, but I ain't gwine ter do hit, dough dat don' hinder me fum git-tin' 'im ter git light'ood, en t'ar'pins, en clum'in' up de trees atter cher'es, en de lak er dat, does hit, li'l' Missis? I wush dat pile er light'ood 'ud las' you a yeah, 'deed I does. Kin I fetch you a drink er water er anyt'ing else, li'l' Missis? I'se gwine 'long now, den, ef you don' want nuttin'—good night, li'l' Missis. L'il' Missis, scuze me fer axin' you, but please, marm, may I kiss yo' han', bein' how ez hit's Chris'mus-ebe?

Poor girl! There were tears in her trembling voice as she thus sought to assure me that her last thought in

parting from the old life was of the "li'l' Missis" who had been the object of her loving care through their joint lives.

The light-wood, which she mentioned as "light'ood," is the heart of the pine tree. It gives a most brilliant and beautiful light, though the black smoke is disagreeable. At that time candles and oil were very scarce and a light-wood torch was the best substitute we had. Previous to the war the servants used it in the quarters and at the corn-shuckings and camp-meetings, their black faces gleaming out wierdly in the glare as they danced and sang and shouted.

When morning dawned no "Chris'-mus gif! Chris'mus gif!" sounded through the house as in the olden

Christmas mornings. No cheery voices rang out from the quarters and kitchens. The sable servitors who had so earnestly protested their undeviating loyalty the evening before had taken the midnight steamer from Barrett's neck and gone across to Newport News, leaving desolation behind them, for "Marse Da'" and all the family were deeply attached to the household servants, as well as dependent upon them for personal services. Most of the field hands had gone long before, but those who had just departed were like members of the family.

After we had eaten our sad Christmas breakfast and tried to enjoy the delight of the little ones over their home-made babies with hickory-nut heads and rag bodies, and sorghum

candy shaped into men and animals, all of an African hue, my father and I went down to the quarters to look around and lock them up. Just as we were returning, mamma, who had joined us, called our attention to a pile of corn husks lying in the corner.

“Look ! What can that be ? I saw those husks move. Look, look !”

As they moved again the weak, pitiful wail of a child came from among them. Patsy in her haste had left her baby—poor little thing ! We quickly but gently took the half-starved, half-smothered little one out, but, alas ! it had not been left, as we first supposed, accidentally. It was warmly wrapped in its blanket, its clothes in a bundle beside it. A barrel hoop was curved carefully around it to prevent its being

smothered by the covers, and a rag with mashed sweet potato and flag-root tied up in it was in its mouth. The little thing was only five weeks old, and the mother instinct had been overcome by the apprehension of the care and inconvenience of taking so helpless a being on a difficult journey.

Mamma carried the little waif into the house, where we fed, bathed and dressed it. Then we called the children and told them that we had a real live baby which old Santa Claus had left for them, and, as it belonged to them all together, each one must feel the responsibility and care of it. They were wild with delight, and asked many questions about how old Santa had evaded the Yankee sentinels, and why he had brought a black real baby

and mulatto doll babies and black candies and colored things? Was it for truly a black Santa Claus this year?

Perhaps there never was an uglier, more weazen-faced little pickanninny than our Charity, as we named the Christmas baby, but neither was there ever one brighter or more cunning. The possession of such a prize not only made that Christmas day a happy one for the children but brought comfort and help to us all as the years came and went.

With the gentlest, tenderest heart she ministered to the suffering, whether of the human family or of the yet undeveloped tribe whose souls look dumbly through eyes that silently question of the great mystery of pain. The lambs which were motherless or ill fell to her

care. All the deserted little chickens and ducks appealed with irresistible force to her maternal heart and found a congenial home with her. When a little calf chanced to be thrown helpless and unprotected on the shore of life it was at once adopted into her happy family.

All such waifs flourished under her fostering care, and she became the owner of a herd of stock branded in her own name. She accumulated a nice little bank account, not only from the sale of her eggs and chickens, but for the "worth of her service," which my father began to put to her credit when she was six years old.

Charity's mother, after fifteen years of shiftless wandering, accidentally learned of these possessions, and,

through the aid of a would-be philanthropist, came back and claimed her child.

We had all become tenderly attached to the little baby left us by old Santa as a Christmas gift to lighten that desolate morning long ago. The dear little children who had come to me in the meantime were devoted to her, and never wearied of her stories about "Br'er Byar en de creeturs, de tar baby, de briah patch, Sis Cow en Br'er Buzzard." With the supernatural yearnings of the undeveloped mind, their favorite history was of the acquisitive negro who, having stolen the dollars from a dead woman's eyes, was ever after pursued by an avenging phantom with ghastly orbs "flapped open." "Scare me to def, Charity ;

scare me to def!" they would cry, and would listen with delicious shudders of fascinated terror as she tragically recounted the tale of horror.

The passage of the years had increased her ugliness, if possible, and she was the blackest negro I ever saw. Her immense hands and feet, thick lips, flat nose and poppy eyes, her short upper lip, rolled back, showing her little short teeth just coming outside of her gums and looking like two rows of popcorn, did not render her "a thing of beauty." Nevertheless, she was a perennial joy to our household.

Although her mother's entreaties, arguments, and the tempting pictures she drew of city life were but slight attractions to her simple, contented

mind, yet her intuitive sense of filial duty, supported by the influence which our appreciation of the maternal claim impelled us to bring to bear upon the situation, directed her to the new life which was offered her. But here was home. Here were the memories of childhood. Here were all the associations of her loving, gentle, merry life. Here was the protection which had always shielded her from the unknown world, terrifying in its mystery.

The battle of these opposing moral forces was the first conflict of her peaceful life. She had reached the most tragic battle-ground of the soul—the place where duty and pleasure part company. As the tears streamed down her face she looked to my father for help.

"She is your mother," he said.
"Go with her, but whenever you want to come back to us you shall come."

"Nuttin' else but you 'cidin' lak dat is onsettled my 'terminashun, Marse Da'. 'Member, now, don' nobody but you sont me away, Marse Da', en me dat you allers called yo' 'yeah-corn,' 'count er yo' fin'in' me in de husks, en me jes' lak yo' own chile dat you-all done raise fum a baby. En Miss Lizzy stan'in' dar en ain't sayin' nuttin' 'tall fer ter keep me fum gwine needer, en Marse Eddie en de chillun I wuz brung up wid, en Miss Sallie's chillun dat I he'p ter bring up myse'f, en eben down ter de dorgs en de yudder t'ings on de plantation you's mekin' me leabe en g'long whar I don' know nuttin' ner nobody ner nuttin' ner no-

body don' know me. Gwine whar de fiah comes outn a hole in de wall en you kyan' ha'f warm yo'se'f. Who's gwine ter ketch de crabs fer dinner, en fin' de keys w'en dey's los'?—en dey's allers los'. Who's gwine pick de splinters outn Marse Eddie's han's? Who's gwine tek keer er all de drowned t'ings—Oh—Oh—Oh—en who's gwine wring de chickens' necks fer dinner? Mammy, please g'long back widout me. I don' want ter go; you kin hab all de money dat Marse Da' en me is sated up ef you wants hit, but fer de Lawd's sake leabe me yer wid de home-folks."

It was not a scene to arrest the attention of the dignified historian. Its figures might not have claimed the brush of the artist or the pen of the

poet. It was only a little black girl going out from under the roof which had sheltered her merry, care-free, contented life. Yet of all the black and white tragedies which the war had placed upon the stage of Southern life none would appeal more strongly to a heart that had been bound by the olden ties of affection and mutual dependence once uniting the two races.

The Chuckatuck packet answered the signal to stop, the sound of her horn jarring discordantly upon our hearts. Little Charity's effects were put on board and the last farewells were said amid falling tears. My father pulled his hat over his eyes and walked away. The last view we had of our faithful, loving little servitor was as she sat in solitary grief, clasp-

ing her knees and rocking herself to and fro, wailing :

“ You all done sont me away, Marse Da ’! Sont me away fum de ole home ! Sont me whar dar ain’t no fiah ter toas’ my shins—no chickens ner nuttin’ ter nuss ! Sont me away ! Sont me away ! ”



"En de bride tuck de knife en stuck hit in de cake."

DE BRIDEGROOM

"I HOPE you had a merry Christmas, Fannie," I said, as she came in with a waiter of foaming egg-nogg.

"Yas'm, dat I did. 'Deed'm, I had de bes', mos' skrumphous Chris'mus I ebber had in my whole life. We all went ter de cross-roads ter de big weddin', you know, en 'twuz de purties' weddin' you mos' ebber seed. Chris'mus is allers de night we sets fer weddin's.

"We j'ined han's, two by two, en marched in a file, singin' 'We'll kill dat Chris'mus tuckey w'en de bride-

groom comes, we'll kill dat Chris'-mus tuckey w'en he comes.' Jim Turner wuz playin' hit on de fiddle en 'Rastus King he wuz pickin' hit out on de banjo, en Phil en Ned wuz a li'l mo' dan shekin' hit out on de tambereens, en th'ee fo' er 'em wuz beatin' hit out on de bones. De res' er us wuz a singin' hit, sep'n some er dem fryin'-size fresh niggers; dey wuz a clappin' de chune wid dar han's en foots en whis'lin' hit en bangin' de time wid dar huids. De bride, she wuz de fo'mus' er all—a singin' en a leadin' de file in de march, en she suttinly did look nice, en she wuz jes' dressed lubly, too, I tell you.

“Her frock wuz meked er w'ite Swiss muzzle en 'twuz flounced en ruckled en tuckled all ober, en 'pear lak some

er de Swiss muzzle wuz cut in p'int
en on dem p'int en aidges wuz sho-
nuff Hongrytom lace. De tail er de
dress had a gre't long train ter hit be-
hime a sweepin' de flo'. Her w'ite
wail kibered her all ober fum haid ter
foots en dragged 'pon de flo' behime
jes' lak de dress did. She had a real
nice reaf er w'ite flowers 'roun' de
crown-part er her haid en a pyar er
sho-nuff w'ite kid glubs on her han's,
en year-bobs en breas'pins, en a chain
'roun' her naik.

"De house wuz jes' crowded wid
folks. Mos' all de chutch members
dat dey wuz 'quainted wid wuz dar.
En my! but you ought ter a seed dat
supper table! Hit suttinly did look
fine, wid nice li'l' roas'n' pigs, 'bout de
size er pups, en diff'unt kin's er cakes

en candies en ebbyt'ing good you kin name. Deed-en-deed, dough, but dey all nebber mo' dan crouched dar jaws en smacked dar moufs a eatin' dem good t'ings. En de bride's cake, Gee! but 'twuz a joe darter, sho'; 'twuz so big dey said dey had ter bek hit in de dish-pan—de cake pan wa'n't big 'nuff. 'Twuz kibered all ober wid w'ite icin' en a pyar er w'ite turkle-dubs wuz a settin' in de middle cooin' dar bills wid wun-er-nudder.

W'en dey wuz all thoo supper de bes' man tuck de bride by de lef' han' en led her up ter de table whar her cake sot. She hong her haid bashful, lak brides does, den she stuck de knife in de middle er de cake kinder jubersome en meked de firs' cut. Den de preacher he tuck

holt er de knife whar she lef' shekin' in de cake en cut hisse'f out de firs' slish, en 'twuz a gre't big slish, too, lak preachers allers teks. Den de yudders all tuck dar tu'ns a cuttin' dar slishes out. Mr. Britt's Judy, she got de gol' ring, en yo' gran'pa's bow-legged, gap-moufed Jim, he got de thimble. Dey all laugh mought'ly w'en Jim's knife struck 'g'inst de thimble, en dey say he 'bleeged ter git mar'ed now sho'; en who gwine hab 'im? Jim, he didn' lak hit much, but bein' ez 'twuz Chris'mus he didn' say nuttin'. Co'se dey all tuck dar slish er bride's cake home wid 'em ter dremp 'bout who wuz gwine be de naix ter git mar'ed.

"Atter dey all got thoo dey cl'ared de kitchen fer a dance; en dey danced en played games 'twel mos' day-bre'k;

de young folks dancin' en de ole folks playin' 'hide de thimble' en kissin' games."

"I am very glad you had such a nice time," I said, "but you have not told me anything about the bridegroom. How did he look?"

"Nar'm, I knows I didn' tell you nuttin' 'tall 'bout de bridegroom, 'kaze he wa'n't dar. Nar'm; po' Ligey Patterson, de bridegroom, wuz daid, en so dey didn' hab no groom present. De railroad train run ober him kinder ax'dental-lak, dey said, en kilt 'im daid. Co'se dat meked hit eminent dat we all couldn' poserble hab had nuttin' but de bride present at de weddin'.

"Hit suttinly wuz moughty sad, too, dat po' Ligey couldn' git dar in time;

but you see de railroad train run ober him de ebenin' befo' jes' 'twix' dust en sundown, en de weddin' wa'n't 'twel de naix night. Dey got de jimmyjohn er good ole whisky, dough, whar Ligey wuz fetchin' home wid 'im fer ter mek drams outn fer 'em all ter drink at his weddin'. Co'se dey all felt moughty bad 'bout de bridegroom; but ez ebbyt'ing wuz raidydey suttinly would a been moughty foolish ter a upsot de whole weddin' jes' 'count er a ax'dent ter one pusion. Chris'mus, too, en de supper cooked—den, ag'in, de bride en de fambly en de preacher en all de yudder frien's wuz dar. De groom, you see, wuz de *onlyes'* *one* dat wuz missin'.

"Bro' 'Lias Mason wuz de firs' one dat come 'cross po' Ligey Patterson

atter he got kilt. He say 'twuz a awful sight. De po' man wuz skaddled all 'bout de place, sep'n his haid en shoul'ers—dey wuz on de same side er de track wid dat jimmyjohn er whisky. But howcome dat liquor didn' all git spilt en howcome dat jimmyjohn didn' git bruck dey say wuz one er dem providential suckumstances dat is disclosed fum de eyes er mortal man.

“Bro' 'Lias say po' Ligey Patterson wuz lyin' down 'pon de track fas' asleep w'en de train come 'long en kilt him daid. But ebbybody, young en ole, thunk dat de mos' stronagin queersome t'ing 'bout de whole bizness wuz how in de name er de Lawd po' Ligey Patterson, ez fond ez he wuz er his dram, could a gone ter

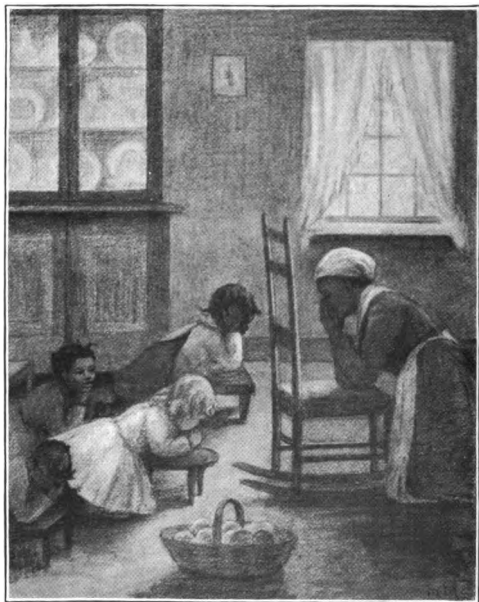
sleep wid a jimmyjohn er good ole whisky a lyin 'long side er him.

“De preacher en some er de chutch members wuz talkin' 'bout hit at de weddin' en dey said dat dey didn' b'leebe de courts would eben gib any damages ter Ligey 'count er his gittin' kilt, kaze dey said deze ve'y suckumstances would jestify any pack er jury-men in 'cidin' dat Ligey wuz eeder a ijutt er wa'n't in his ret min', one. En Bro' 'Lias say dat ebbybody knows dat anybody wid good senses ain't gwine ter sleep w'en dey got sich good comp'ny wid 'em ez a jimmyjohn er good ole whisky ter wrop darse'fs 'roun'; en dat whisky er Ligey's wa'n't none er yo' sorghum skimmin's, ner kerosene ile, ner 'lasses, ner needer bug-juice, but sho-nuff good ole rye. Dey all

suttinly did hab a splimmy, splammy time, too, mekin' drams outn hit, jes' ez sho' ez you's bawn."

"How perfectly dreadful!" I said. "Why, this seems almost heathenish. It is absolutely shocking that you could all have had such merriment when your friend, for whose sake the feast was partly made, had just met so horrible and tragic a death. Especially does it seem heartless in the bride to have entered into such festivities when her bridegroom was a corpse of a day. I should think she would have folded up all her beautiful clothes and locked them away and spent the Christmas eve in prayer and in weeping for her dead rather than laughing and dancing and marching and singing with the living."

“Dat wouldn’ do Ligey no good’m; dat wouldn’ bring ’im back ter life ag’in—nar’m. I don’ mean no dis-respec’, but ’deed’m, I don’ know so much ’bout all dat restress en cryin’ en prayin’ lak you say. Co’s’e we all wuz ’bleeged ter be sorry ’bout de ax’dent dat keep de bridegroom fum gittin’ ter his own weddin’, en de bride, she wuz sorry ’long wid de res’ er us; but den, ag’in, a nur’ t’ing, w’en you come ter t’ink ’bout hit, de bridegroom wa’n’t no blood kin er her’n, nohow.”



“Kneel down en ax de good Lawd ter he’p you root out
de lub er bad comp’ny dat’s ’bout ter tek ’session er
yo’ li’l enmottled souls.”

MAMMY BORRY.

“WHOSE dat been mekin’ all deze corn-cob pens en pilin’ up all deze oyscher shells en rocks en pine burs in de cornder er my fence? Come yer, you ’shievous li’l’ ragged muffins, you! Come yer! I gre’t min’ ter skin you alibe!”

“’Twa’n’t me, Ung’ Charles! ’Twa’n’t me!” echoed from a chorus of frightened voices, and though the little “ragged muffins,” as Uncle Charles called them, each and all knew that there was no harm in do-

ing any one of these things, yet Uncle Charles' threatening tone, together with the fear of his disapproval, kaleidoscoped their innocent pastime into a heinous crime.

"Look yer," replied Uncle Charles, "does you li'l' story-tellin' limbs aspeck me ter b'leebe dat all deze yer rocks en t'ings is got cunjer laigs en got up en walked yer fum dar natchul homes ter hol' a mass meetin' in de cornder er my fence? Come yer, you ball-eyed pack er Anerniases en Safirases! I gwine see ef I kyan' lam some trufe in you wid dis bunch er swishes."

"Deed,'deed, Ung' Charles,' twa'n't we-alls, en ef 'twuz, we didn' go ter do hit."

"Hesh up, hesh up, you 'sateful

pieces er 'possum meat. Don' you know de cheaper de talk de higher de perwishuns en de fouler de fur on yo' tongue? Come yer en git w'at dere's comin' ter you."

"Touch one of them if you dare!" I said. "I made this trash."

"You mek all dis yer mess? — You? Name-er-grashus! Den you mus' got up 'fo' daybre'k; en mo' dan dat, ole Miss Witch mus' fotch you a snoutful er ole man Elefant's strenkf w'ile you wuz asleep ter meked you able ter do all dis 'mount er wuk. Come yer! Le' me look behime yo' years en see ef you ain't got some Sampson locks sproutin'. 'Kaze ef you's dat surwigus I mought hab ter git me some he'p. Imoughtn't hab strenkf 'nuff ter kyar you en dis bunch er swishes bofe

all by myse'f in ter yo' gran'ma ter see w'at she gwine ter say 'bout all dis stronagin bizness. You all been 'soshatin' wid yo'se'f a heap too much, en you, li'l' Missis, you'll sho'ly hab ter git waxinated 'g'inst kotchin' dis yer Annernias en Safiras disease dat's gwine 'bout."

My little friends could not stand my humiliation and discomfort any longer, and between their sniffing acknowledged that they were the culprits.

"Please, suh, fergib us dis time," they sobbed, "en we won' nebber do so no mo'."

"Ah, hong! Ah, hong! Look yer, you li'l' nappy-haided, skaly-footed, pigeon-toed sap-suckers you! Don' you know dat you got ter trabble wid a suckus ter git ahaid er yo' Ung'

Charles, en dat you mought jes' ez well try ter hide fum yo' own shadders ez ter hide de trufe fum him? Dog my cats! Ef 'twa'n't fer sump'n ret yer in my breas' I'd chune you all up anyhow, dough 'twa'n't de mess you-all meked dat I wuz gwine scol' you 'bout. 'Twuz 'count er yo' was'in' all dis good bread en 'lasses en sweet'taters, ez many hongry, styarbin' folks ez dar is in de lan' er de libin'. You chillun habs too much ter eat fer yo' own good.

"Hesh yo' sniffin' now, you li'l' corcodile Judus 'Skariots you, en tu'n yo' frocks hin' part befo', 'kaze de front part is too pizen brack ter look at, en g'long wid yo' li'l' Missis ter yo' Mammy Borry's cabin en tell yo' Mammy Borry I say ter tell you 'bout Marse

Gin'ul Jawge Washin'ton en boutn dat time he swunged his coat sleebe en mos' bu'nt his ret han' off tryin' ter grab a apple core outn de fiah 'fo' hit bu'nt up, 'kaze he say 'twuz sinful ter bu'n up anyt'ing dat a bird er a creeter could eat. Tell her ter tell you boutn dat cherry tree, too, en don'-chu-all neber tell a story ag'in ez long ez you libs, but ef you does happen ter tell one do lak Marse Gin'ul Washin'ton did en stick ter hit thoo thick en thin, 'kaze a story dat's stuck ter is jamby ez good ez de trufe. G'long now en stop was'in' my time. 'Nudder t'ing, we's gwine ter hab wedder d'reckly, en you-all mought git kotch in hit, en git wet."

We were always glad of the privilege of going to Mammy Borry, but

this time we hailed the opportunity with peculiar delight.

“Deed, li'l Missis,” said Mary Francis, “I feels lak I wuz bruck all out thick wid Chris'mus gif's en Fofer Julys, I feels so good, don'-chu?”

Mammy Borry laughed as we told her of our hair-breadth escape, and said:

“My chillun, yo' Ung' Charles' bark is a heap wusser dan his bite ; he didn' hab no notion er tetchin' you—he jes' want ter teach you not ter be was'eful ner not ter foller de jay bird's trade.”

“But,” I said, “Mammy Borry, they say Uncle Charles used to whip all the children on the plantation when he caught them in stories or mischief or telling tales on one another.”

“Yas, honey, dat's so,” said Mammy Borry, “but dat wuz 'fo' li'l Horner

thawed out his heart wid fader-lub. But dat deah li'l' Horner-boy changed yo' Ung' Charles' temperashun thoo en thoo en subjewed all his rashfulness. 'Fo' our li'l' Horner come inter dis worl' er restress en lef' fer de lan' er promise yo' Ung' Charles wuz a moughty diff'unt man. 'Fo' dat he wuz a gre't hunter. He had mo' dan a hund'ud traps whar he use' ter set uver winter nights, en he had sich luck wid coons en weasels en ole hyars en 'possums en all kin's er varments dat de outsides er we-all's li'l' cabin wuz kibbered wid skins nait up ter dry all de time ; but w'en li'l' Horner die yo' Ung' Charles gin his coon dorgs en all his traps away. 'Pear lak anyt'ing dat wuz young en he'pless sot 'im in min' er li'l' Horner-boy.

“De foll'in' spring atter our li'l' Horner wen' ter lib wid de angels yo' gran'ma had our cabin all painted w'ite en de varment-skin marks wuz all kibbered ober wid paint. Den we planted flowers en wines all 'long de sides, so now whar de varment skins use'ter be de mawnin' glories tangles up wid each yudder 'mongst iby leabes en honeysuckles en yaller en w'ite jessamines, en by de time de sweetness er dar bref is cut short de seben sister roses en de Lady Banksher roses en de golden cluster roses dey comes en ber-fumes de a'r fer us.

“Kalacancers en laylacks en obeandrews en oringers grows on bofe sides er our palin's. We allers has some flowers ter gib 'way fer fune'als en weddin's en infairs, but we nebber

bre'ks a lily-er-de-valley off, kaze dey puts us in min' er li'l' Horner. De ve'y day he wuz tuck sick we missed de li'l' feller en w'en we foun' 'im he wuz stan'in' in de bed er de lilies-er-de-valley. Dar he wuz wais' deep 'mongst de green leabes en w'ite lilies—de w'ite lilies en his li'l' drab face en curly haid bowin' up en down en kissin' one-er-nudder. He come a scramblin' 'long out w'en we called 'im, a laffin' en showin' his li'l' w'ite teef wid his ap'un full er lilies.

“Li'l' Horner's gwine 'way f'um us meked a heap er out'ard ez well ez in'ard changes wid bofe me en yo' Ung' Charles. Our back yard in dem days used ter be littered up wid varment traps en pieces er lumber, but now hit's bordered off wid yerbs fer de

sick, mint fer drams en lamb sauce, en pennyroyal fer fleas. In one cornder sets de chicken coop fer de bantams en shanghais, en in de yudder sets de dorg house, dat ole blue tub tu'nt bottom sides up wid a hole in de side fer de dorg ter go in outn de rain er ter hide his bone w'en he don' want ter dig a hole in de groun'."

"Is the inside of the cabin changed, too?" I asked.

"Co'se, honey, dar's changes in yer, too, sence de li'l' playt'ings wuz put away en de li'l' cradle stopped a rockin'. All deze yer nice t'ings you see yo' gran'ma en her frien's gin me, en I aims ter keep hit lak w'ite folks libed in hit. See how 'ticular I is 'bout you-all wipin' yo' foots en 'bout you drappin' crumbs."

I had often found a pleasure in observing the extreme care with which Mammy Borry kept her pretty little home. Simple as it was, it far outshone in neatness and attractiveness many a grand mansion which I have since known. The immaculate bed with its ruffled valence and pillow shams and unruffled smoothness of snowy counterpane invited to sweet repose. Curtains of white dimity draped the windows and were drawn back in soft folds to give free entrance to the bars of light that the sun threw across the bright rag carpet, which looked always as if it were just from the loom. The flag-bottomed chairs held no threat of damage to the most delicate muslin gown fresh from the iron.

Through the clear glass doors of the cupboard I saw the strange, many-figured blue china which was at once the puzzle and the delight of my childhood. What remote and mysterious land could produce such wonderful blue trees with branches drooping earthward under the weight of a burden of blue leaves? A perennial interest centered in the guileless indigo maiden with apron brimming over with variegated blue roses. The astonishing poses of the deep-blue boy filled my childish mind with bewilderment. To apply those dishes to any of the ordinary purposes of tableware seemed like an unwarrantable interference with the internal economy of a far-off and unknown country.

The nest of crickets in the corner

"fer de chillun ter set 'pon" were thrones of happiness.

High art was represented by plaster-of-Paris figures purchased from wandering peddlers. One in particular which delighted me was a nondescript animal hitherto unknown to science and very striking in its individuality. I had studied it with greater attention to detail than I had ever bestowed upon any other zoological specimen. It had never impressed me as strictly beautiful, but there was an unfailing fascination in its blue head and green body, saffron-tinted tail and red paws.

In the bottom drawer of the dresser were carefully placed our thimbles and picture books and playthings, "g'inst de naix' time we come," and the tin box of cakes and beaten biscuit which

was always the reward of our behavior, whether good or bad.

To Mammy Borry's we went to weave our daisy love and clover luck chains. On our little crickets we would sit with long-threaded needles around a big tin pan filled with apples or pears or peaches peeled and cut into quarters ready for us to string, the many little black hands and the one little white pair vieing with each other to see which could make the neatest and greatest number of strings by "de time Ung' Charles come ter hang 'em up 'g'inst de back side er de cabin fer ter dry." I can still feel the thrill of admiration with which we would gaze up at the fruit-garnished walls—the fruit of our hands.

When the nut-gathering time of au-

tum came Mammy Borry's walls were ornamented with our long strings of shining "chinkapins." In the snowman days, when with purpling lips and benumbed limbs we would warm ourselves by Mammy Borry's fire, she would blow her breath on our tingling fingers and cuddle them in her apron "ter keep 'em fum stingin'," sometimes making us play "'round and 'round the mulberry bush" "ter suckulate de blood, 'kaze 'twuz too cole ter go ter de fiah 'twel we got het up some."

She taught us to make our doll clothes and sew carpet rags, telling us the while her folk-lore stories. Nothing tasted so good as the sweet potatoes and ash-cakes baked in the ashes in Mammy Borry's fire-place; no corn

ever popped so white or even as that which she popped.

"Yas, chillun," she would say, "happiness is hid away in ebby chink en crevice er yo' Mammy Borry's cabin ready ter jump out at you en race wid you ter see w'ich gwine tetch base firs', you er happiness."

She tried in her own subtle way to point our little feet to the right path. We never went in vain to her for help or sympathy.

"Dar, dat'll do, honey," she would say, "Mammy Borry'll do all de cryin' fer you ; dar, hit'll be all right 'fo' you git mar'ed."

One day when through our disobedience we had gotten into trouble with the overseer's children and went to her to settle it she said :

“Chillun, you greebes yo’ Mammy Borry ter de heart. She gwine ax de Lawd ter tek her home ter Glory whar de good chillun don’ go in bad comp’ny ef you keeps on lak dis. Po’ w’ite folks is mos’ in genally onprincipled—’deed, dey sets mo’ sto’ by dere laziness dan dey does by any yudder principle dey got, en dey t’anks de Lawd dat nobody ner nuttin’ kin tek dat blessin’ ’way fum ’em anyhow.

“G’long, now, en git outn yo’ crickets en kneel down en ax de good Lawd ter he’p you root out de lub er bad comp’ny dats ’bout ter tek ’session er yo’ po’ li’l’ enmottled souls.”

Out came our little crickets and down upon our knees we went, Mammy Borry herself kneeling with clasped hands in front of her own chair.

“ ‘Now I lay me down to sleep,’ ”
we all began.

Mammy Borry took her hands down
and looked around, saying :

“No, chillun, no; you ain’t layin’
yo’s’e’fs down ter sleep now, en you
ain’t axin’ fer no daily bread, needer,
fer you ain’t hongry. W’at you wants
ter ax fer is good comp’ny, a high-
tone dispersition en a clean sperit, so
dat you won’ seek bad ’soshates en
low-sperited folks. Hit all ’pen’s ’pon
how you treats de bee w’edder you gits
honey or gits sting. Now, let us
pray.”

Up went our little hands again and
up went our trusting voices to our
Heavenly Father, saying:

“Good Lawd, gib us chillun a high-
tone dispersition fer good comp’ny, en

keep us 'way fum po' w'ite trash. Good Lawd, gib us clean sperits so dat we don' want ter 'soshate wid no low-sperited folks. Good Lawd, he'p us ter treat de bee so we'll get all de honey."

Over and over again with a few variations we prayed this prayer, peeping through our fingers to see Mammy Borry take down her hand and give us the signal to rise. It came with, "Lawd, we beseech Dee ter year de prahers er dese Dy sinful chillun en lead dar hearts inter de stre't en narer paf. Amen!"

"Come 'long, now, chillun, en 'semble yo'se'fs 'roun' me en lemme ax you how of'n is I tole you 'bout 'soshatin' wid po' w'ite folks. Dey don' lak niggers 'kaze dey nebber ownt none, en dey don' lak ladies en gem-

mans 'kaze dey kyan' nebber be ekals wid 'em. You chillun is jes' lak de birds in de Bible; you kyan' play wid pots en kittles en smutty t'ings, widout gittin' smutty lak dey is.

"Deze yerpo' w'ite' migrashun folks gwine smut you jes' ez sho' ez you bawn ef you don' let 'em' lone. Dey'll git familious wid you 'pon no pertense. Jes' look at dar chillun. Dey has so' eyes en dirty finger nails en warts stickin' out on ebby one dar knuckle j'int. Dey mos' all has sandy hyar en snagged teefs, en dar moufs allers has crumbs 'roun' 'em, widout dey's clay-eaters; den dey's smeared wid dirt. Ebby las' one er 'em is bow-legged, en none er 'em don' hab no stopper ter dar noses, en you chillun gwine ter ketch ebbyt'ing dey got ef

you don' stop dis 'soshatin' en familiousness wid 'em.

"Dat'll do. Mammy ain't gwine scol' her chillun no mo.' Set down dar, my darlin's, 'pon yo' li'l' crickets 'twel mammy gits you some sweet cakes en some beads ter string, en don' drap no crumbs 'pon mammy's flo'."

One rainy day on the eve of Christmas we had run the entire scale of our pleasures and grown weary of looking out of the windows at the sad-eyed, bedraggled cows with their clanking bells that sounded like mourning chimes through the heavy air. The wet, disconsolate, drooping chickens each stood on one leg as if preparing to play "Chick-a-my crany crow"; the impatient, lonesome-eyed dog

peeped out of his tub, and the little birds fluttered their dripping feathers, until we were tired of ourselves and everything we could see. We begged Mammy Borry to tell us again, though we had heard it so many times before, about the golden crowns and the silver-haired lady and show us again her locket and things.

"Yer is de ring," she said, and we each in succession tried it on all our fingers, reluctantly giving it up. Then she took down the little box covered with shells and unlocked it and allowed us each in turn to try on the other treasures. Looking at them with caressing eyes she locked them up and began :

"'Twuz a long time ago now, chillun, en I don' know ter dis day

how I happened ter go skaddlin' off
thoo de woods all by myse'f, fer I
nebber wuz no 'migrashun nigger.
'Pear lak dat day I wuz cunjer-footed
en dat 'twuz anudder min' dan de one
I had in my haid dat perambulated
me off down de road en thoo de woods
en 'cross de branches ter de cat-pon'
cross-roads. De day wuz lak a lookin'
glass. 'Pear lak Gord's bressin' res'ed
'pon ebbyt'ing. Eben de ole broom-
sedge fiel' wuz fyarly 'libe wid butter-
flies en hummin'-birds, en ez I walked
thoo de grobes de oaks en elms, de
striplin's en hick'rys, de poplars en
dogwoods, de sycamo's en beeches all
sifted de sunshine down 'pon me thoo
dar leaves, en now en den w'en a bird
er a breeze would waf' de leaves de
dew would mix wid de sunshine en

sprinkle off en drap down 'pon me, too.
De li'l' streams 'cross de roads wuz ez
cl'ar ez ice en wuz teeterin' wid Gord's
lub-light. Ebby now en den you
could see li'l' w'ite rocks en li'l' pink
shells peepin' thoo de ripples. De
roads en pafs wuz bordered wid mosses
en wines en wil' flowers.

"I knowed dat my foots wuz bein'
tuck up en put down fer me by some
speritstronger dan mine, 'kaze I nebber
skalahooted off lak dis 'fo' in all my
life. 'Fo' I eben thunk 'bout whar I
wuz gwine ter I wuz stan'in' un'neaf
de ve'y tree dat yo' Ung' Charles foun'
me un'er. Dar wuz de notch he
meked 'pon hit dat firs' day, en dar
wuz a notch he meked 'pon hit fer
ebby one er my buf-days sence dat
day. I counted de notches en dar

wuz sixteen in all. 'Twuz jes' ez still out dar in dem woods ez de grabeyard. I could year my heart beatin' en I yeard a pheasant drummin' 'way off yander in de distance, en pres'n'y I yeard sump'n cracklin' en I looked 'roun' en 'twuz a lonesome ole screech-owl settin' up in de tree twis'in, en turnin' hisse'f 'roun' inter a mo' comf'tabler persition so dat he could shet his eyes up ag'in en drap off ter sleep.

"I stood dar lookin' up at de tree en studd'in' 'bout dat queersome cradle er mine—dat hornet's nes', what wuz settin' up snug in de roun', smobe crotch—de crotch wuz dar still—en 'bout who could a put me dar en w'at would a become er me ef yo' Ung' Charles hadn' come 'cross me w'en he

did, en how anybody happened ter t'ink 'bout sich a place ez a hornet's nes' anyhow ter put a li'l' new-bawn baby in.

"W'ile I wuz t'inkin' hard, my heart a gwine pump-pump-pump, I yeard sump'n dat soun' lak a winder-blin' dat de rain had swelled screechin' to, en I look 'roun' quick en dar wuz a lady runnin' to'ds me on her tippin' toes. She wuz dressed all in pupple en pink en her hyar wuz w'ite ez wax en wuz in wabes all 'roun' her li'l' face. She wuz out er bref en look lak she wuz skeered er ha'nts. She stop short en say: 'Auf-auf-auf.' Den she gask out en say: 'Vat ees yo' name?' She didn' talk lak our folks.

"I tell her my name wuz Nettie Beech, dat I wuz name Nettie atter de

hornet's nes' dat dey firs' come 'cross me in, en Beech atter dis ve'y tree dat hilt de hornet's nes', en I tole her all 'bout Ung' Charles fin'in' me in de nes' dat Chris'mus Ebe's mawnin' w'en he wuz gittin' hollerberries en ebbergreens en runnin' cedar ter dress de chutch, en how he drapped all dat chutch wuk en wropped me up in his coat en kyar'ed me back home wid 'im jes' ez fas' ez he could run.

"I tole her dat tree wuz my fader, en de nes', w'ich wuz at de house now, wuz my mudder, en she say, 'No, no, no,' en retch outn her arms en clask her han's en say: 'Lah mame, lah mame' (la même)! I thunk she didn' un'stan' my name, en I say: 'No'm; Nettie—Nettie Beech.' Den she soush her bref slow en waff her haid moneful en say,

'lah mame, lah mame,' en say sump'n 'bout some kin' er lap-robe (la pauvre). I didn' un'stan' de yudder name, en I didn' un'stan' w'at she said much no-how, 'kaze she didn' talk our kin' er talk. De onlyes' wud I un'stood good wuz de wud 'fiel', fiel', fiel'' (fille), en she say dat ober en ober ag'in en soush her arms en shiber herse'f ebby time she'd say hit.

"Po' t'ing! She suttinly did do lak she wuz in a heaper mis'ry. Den she'd say, 'auf, auf, auf,' en de tears would jes' triculate down her face. Once she stop ret sudden en say sump'n lak 'my chill, my chill.' I say: 'Yas'm, 'tis cole.' Den she say: 'No, no; c-hee-l, c-hee-l! Veel you k-e-e-s me; my c-hee-l?' 'Yas'm,' I say. 'W'at is kees?' Den she flung her arms 'roun'

me en kissed me. I don' bleebe nobody had ebber kissed me befo'. Den she say: 'Tell me yo' name some mo'.' En I tole her.

"'Pear lak de po' lady couldn' un'stan' my talk needer no mo' dan I could hern, 'kaze she call me her Bell (ma belle). Den she sough her haid lak she wuz in mis'ry ag'in en say sump'n 'bout a tree bein' a nice pa—she say dis ober en ober ag'in" (N'est ce pas). "Den she put bofe her li'l' han's on de yudder sides er my face en say: 'Nettie! Nettie! My Nettie An-twum-net (Antoinette), zat ees yo' name!' Oh, de way hit soun' ter my years w'en she say 'Nettie! Nettie!' en de way my beatin' heart mos' bu'st wide open wid de soun', onlyes' me en de bressed Virgin Mary up in Heaben ebber kin know.

“‘I loaf you, Nettie,’ she say, ‘I loaf you, en I veel come some mo’. We — we — we (oui); I veel come some mo’.’

“Den she fergit ag’in ’bout my be-in’ name Nettie, en call me Bell, en say ‘fiel,’ fiel’,’ ober ag’in en ag’in. I dunno w’at kin’ er fiel’ she wuz talkin’ ’bout, dough mebbe she meant de woods whar she wuz in. Woods mought mean fiel’ in her kin’ er talk. Pres’n’y she say, ‘Tell me some mo’,’ en I tole her all ’bout myse’f en Ung’ Charles en ole Missis en ebbyt’ing.

“Did you tell her ’bout us?” we asked.

“No, chillun, you-all wa’n’t bawn.”

“Was she black, Mammy?” I asked.

“No, honey; she wuz a light be-

drabbled color, en, oh, she wuz so purty! She tuck dis ring offn her han' en put hit 'pon mine, en tuck dat locket dat I showed you fum 'roun' her naick en tuck en clask hit 'roun' mine. Den she onpinned de breas'-pin I showed you en pinned hit on me, en say dey wuz all mines, mines ter keep ferebbermo'. Den she flung her arms 'roun' me ag'in en hole me close en whisker sump'n sof' en low dat I didn' hab no un'erstan'in' w'at de meanin' er hit wuz. W'ile she wuz whiskerin' low in my years we yeard sump'n soun' in de distance, en we bofe looked behime us en, po' t'ing, she trombled all ober en looked lak she wuz skeered ter def. She kissed me ag'in quick en say, 'Nettie, I veel come some mo'; I veel come some mo'.'

“Den dar wuz a w’istle en de buseful lady pucked up her frock en start off ter run lak de Ole Boy wuz tryin’ ter kotch her. De las’ wud I yeard her say wuz ’bout dat ‘fiel’ dat seemed ter bodder her so. Ez she wuz gwine ’long her shawl kotch on a daid limb, but she nebber stop ter onhitch hit. She jes’ looked back at me, den noddod ter whar de shawl wuz kotch. I run en onhitched hit en run atter her ter gib it ter her, en jes’ ez I got ter de road I seed her gittin’ in a big yaller-ledder carriage. She seed me, too, en waf’ her han’ back—empatient-lak, lak she want me ter keep out er sight er de carriage.

“Dar wuz a oldish lookin’ gemman settin’ on de behime seat. I looked at ’im good, too, w’ile he wuz lookin’

de yudder way. He had a big bile on his year, en a nose jes' lak a bird's nes' wid a big wa't stickin' out on one side er hit. He had tuf's er brack w'iskers growin' thick en close all 'roun' his face, en a shock er hyar un'neaf dat funny-lookin' li'l cap he had on; but his hyar wuz grizzly, dough.

"Pres'n'y de carriage start off, en I see de li'l' han' wid sump'n w'ite in hit waffin' hitse'f outside de carriage winder—waffin' back en fofe, lak dis. Den, 'pear lak de li'l' han' flung hitse'f back'ards en de li'l' w'ite sump'n dat wuz in de han' drapped in de middle er de road. I run en picked hit up. 'Twuz de hank-'cher dat I jes showed you, en tied up in de cornder wuz sump'n hard. I

run 'long behime de carriage, tryin' ter
koteh up wid hit widout knowin' w'at
I wuz doin'. 'Pear lak I wuz addled.
Pres'n'y she puck her haid out at de
winder and shuck hit at me en waf'
me back. I sot down in de san' en
said ober ter myse'f sof' en easy, dat
sweet wud 'Mudder,' en cried en
cried lak my heart would bu'st wide
open. Den I got up en come 'long
home.

"I nebber shill fergit de look er dat
li'l' face ez she tuck hit back thoo de
winder ez long ez I lib. Hit looked
lak a angel's face dat had missed hit's
holt er hit's onlies' chile-angel en had
drapped hit outn hit's arms en bruck
off bofe hit's wings, en dat de ax'dent
ter de chile-angel's wings had hu't
hit's own wings so bad dat dey couldn'

fly wid no pleajure ferebber no mo'.
Oh, dat face, en oh, de soun' er dat
sweet woice! 'Pears lak I kin year'
'em en see 'em ez plain ez ef dey wuz
ret yer. No, I nebber kin fergit dat
berseechin' look. Dough I went
ebby yeah atter dis ter de beech tree
en count de notches en watched en
prayed, I nebber 'sep'n in my dreams
seed dat sweet face ner yeard dat sweet
woice no mo'—no mo'.

"One dark, dretful night, w'en de
win' wuz a swirlin' ena howlin', I wuk
up suddent lak I had de swamp ager.
De win' wuz a zoonin' thoo ebby crevice
en chink in de house. De fiah had
bu'nt low en wuz cas'n' shadders. I
yeard sump'n sigh, en I wuz jes' gwine
ter pull all de kibbers ober my haid
w'en a low voice said, 'Nettie! Nettie!'

I knowed de soun', en I looked up en sho-nuff 'twuz de bufeul lady dat waf' me back, come some mo', lak she said she would.

"Dough I'd allers been skeered er sperits en ghos'es all my life, I wa'n't skeered er dis one. No; I riz myse'f up ez brabe ez Depolyon Bonesparten hilt out my han' en meked a place fer her ter come en lay down ret beside me. De win' wuz howlin' so cole, en she looked lak she wuz chilled thoo en thoo. She smiled de sweetes' smile at me. She'd done got a peaceful look now in her bufeul face en she retch out her sperit arms ter me en say some er dem ve'y wuds she say un'neaf de beech tree. Jes' ez I open my mouf ter answer her back de fiah flickcred hit's light 'pon her face en

de win' ceased en she aspeared. I knowed den my mudder wuz daid. All night long I lay dar en cried en called out loud, 'Mudder! Mudder! Mudder!' en retched out my arms atter her.

"De naix mawnin' I went ter yo' gran'ma en tole her I want ter go in mo'nin' en axt her ef she couldn' let me hab one er her crape weils en brack frocks en a pyar er brack silk glubs. She say, 'Nettie, is you los' yo' min'?' I say 'No'm, I los' my mudder.' Den I bu'st out cryin' en drapped down on de cricket at her foots en tole her ebbyt'ing, 'kaze I knowed my tellin' our secret now didn' mek no diff'unce, fer my mudder wuz daid. Yo' gran'-ma cried jes' lak you en me is cryin' now, en she say, 'Nettie, you shall go in mo'nin' ef you wants ter.'

“Den she went 'long wid me, en I showed her de shawl en yudder t'ings. She say she had seen de ring befo', but 'co'se she nebber would a axt me no queschuns ner meked no 'mirashun 'bout hit widout I had said sump'n ter her firs'.

“I axt her wouldn' she please ter 'cept de shawl fer my sek, en she say, 'W'y, Nettie, dis yer shawl is camel's hyar, en hit's wuf mo' money dan a nigger.' Den I flopped down 'pon my knees ag'in, ret at her foots, en I kotch holt er her frock en say, 'Please, ma'm, please, ma'm, den tek de shawl en gib me Ung' Charles fer hit.' She looked down at me quizzersome en smile en say, 'Nettie, is you gwine ter tu'n nigger trader?' 'No'm,' I say, 'I wants Ung' Charles to own hisse'f

widout knowin' how he come ter do hit.' Den she retched her han' down en he'ped me up en looked me ret in de face en say, 'Nettie, I will grant yo' beques', en I will tek de shawl,' en she tuck hit.

"Den I led her ter de place whar I had bur'ed de gol', en w'en she seed hit she look at hit in 'mirashun en 'stonishment en say, 'Nettie, Nettie! Deze is dublins, dublins. You got 'nuff money yer ter buy you a nice li'l' home.' 'Tek hit den,' I say. 'Please, ma'm, tek hit en buy de nice li'l' home wid hit en fix hit wid de free papers, en be sho' en fix hit so Ung' Charles won' know how come hit all.'

"Co'se, I didn' lak ter hab no secrets fum yo' Ung' Charles, but I didn' want 'im ter know nuttin' 'bout de gol' en

t'ings ner 'bout de bufeul lady ner de sperit dat come ter perdeem de promise, 'I veel come some mo', Nettie,' leas'wise not ret den, 'kaze I laked yo' Ung' Charles, en ef he'd thunk dar wuz anyt'ing wrong 'bout my color, he moughtn't a laked me.

"Yo' gran'ma looked down at me wid de tears drappin' fum her eyes en say, 'My po' loyal li'l' Nettie! My po' li'l' Nettie!' 'No'm,' I say, 'I mought be loyal, but I ain't po'. I kyan' be po' ; no'm, I nebber kin be po' no mo', fer I's been pressed ter my mudder's breas'.'

"Dis is de nice li'l' home whar de dublins buyed. All de res' is Chris-mus gif's—en de home en de gif's en de *secrets* all b'longs ter yo' Ung' Charles."

The ghost of my youth with palpitant wings sits this Christmas Eve in that clean little cottage with its snow-white bed, its tidy-covered rockers, its unrocked cradle. It looks into the great open fire-place where I used to see beautiful flame-pictures of the world's wonderful past, and of my own deep, wide, high, triumphant, impossible future. Between it and the glowing pictures it sees my own cradle left empty, and the lost faces of love. It knows that as memory muffles its steps in the snow of my hair, all the blossoms in the garden of life which have been untouched by the frost are faith and love.



"De ole man lis'en 'twel he got his bearin's stret."

A CHRISTMAS VISTA

YEARS ago in Virginia the greatest day of all the year was Christmas. It was a celebration, in fact, of all the other feast-days, combining the horns with the fire-crackers of Washington's Birthday and the Fourth of July, the Easter Monday eggs with the New Year's egg-nogg and the goodies of Thanksgiving. It was the holiday of holidays, especially to the plantation negro.

Looking back through the long vista of years I recall the shifting scenes of the first Christmas which impressed itself upon my baby mind, and of all the mystic and unexpected delights which make up the blessings of childhood.

Christmas had dawned upon a calm world, spirited in white. Tall and tiny ghosts, ghosts of rosebushes and tombstones, of trees and violets, stood as dazzling sentinels in the unbroken paths of this lamb's-wool earth, peacefully smiling to a perfect heaven—all snow-capped and bejewelled with crystal fringes and anon glistening with green trimmings beset in myriads of sparkling diamonds ; all shimmering and shining in the wealth of down-pouring, golden-glowing, sun-kissed rays.

Presently the breathing stillness is broken. A mingled chorus of voices, childish, mature, and aged, each, however, intoned with Christmas glee and happy expectancy, cut through the lines of jingling icicles, glassy twigs and snow-clad boughs, and was under-voiced in the shrill, jangling, yet jocund blast of the Christmas horn on which Uncle Charles, my grandmother's foreman, with great zeal and strong wind sounded the Christmas reveille to muster the hands, old and young.

Uncle Charles was a conspicuous figure and a noted character, even in his day and negro-generation. He looked like a priest, with his round, fat, jovial face and sleek bald head. He had a full set of false teeth, and while he

held a rather exaggerated admiration of his general external appearance and his moral beauty, it paled in the vanity and pride which he felt in his false teeth, worn more for ornament than use — carried conspicuously on his watch-chain, grinning in a ghastly manner against his inherited black velvet vest on Sundays and holidays, and taken out, too, whenever he ate, drank, or talked.

He was a preacher and class leader and the raiser of hymns in his own congregation, and sexton in the Methodist Church, as well as foreman-overseer for my grandmother. Thus, with so many offices of importance, his people of course held him in constant awe. His manner, except with children, was always deliberate, digni-

fied and peculiar. He never under any circumstances forgot himself into being perfectly naturally-affected, not even when on one occasion the barn caught on fire, and he thought it his duty to acquaint my grandmother of the fact. He gently tapped at her door and said: "Skuze me, Missis, fer wekin' you up so ontimely, but de barn is on fiah." "Well, put it out," she replied with perfect security and confidence.

On this particular Christmas morning of which I am speaking all the plantation and house negroes, little and big, old and young, all the dogs (curs and thoroughbreds), the two pet nanny-goats, the hand-fed lamb and the vain, inquisitive pea-fowls had assembled and were standing in

waiting before Uncle Charles had unpuffed his fat jaws and taken the horn from his crowded mouth.

When he had made an instantaneous but shy inventory, and seen that all his flock were present, he took out his red bandanna, shook out the folds, and carefully wiped the horn inside and out and hung it up in its place on the porch. Then he rubbed, polished and adjusted his spectacles, slowly took out his teeth, and, wiping them with the same bandanna, hitched them on to his big brass watch-chain. He then solemnly closed his eyes for a moment as if in deep and silent prayer, opened them in a startled manner as if for the time he had been lost to the world, and slowly raised both hands and eased up the string behind his dwarfed

ears, which, imbedded in the little rim of kinky wool at the base of his bald head, was attached to the bows of his spectacles.

Looking subduingly and reprov-
ingly over the glasses for another mo-
ment, he said, with an ill-timed tragic
air, unfitting his non-tragic words :

“Stop dat, stop dat, now — you
year me ! I hain’t gwine ter ’low no
ticklin’, ner no laffin’, ner no kyarn’
on, ner no projeckin’ wid wunner-
nudder yer dis mawnin’, dat is, not
leas’wise ’twel I axes you a few p’inted
queschuns, ’bout de preambles en whar-
fo’s er dis emportan’ ’kazion. De firs’
en fo’mus’ queschun dat I’s gwine ter
ax you all is dis,—Who meked you?
De naix en fo’mus queschun dat I’s
gwine ter ax you is,—Whose buf-day

is dis? En de wharfo's er de preamble er my disco'se is espounded in dis queschun,—W'at's de 'kazion er all dis gre't hullerbaloo en fuss?—er all dis pop-crackin' en coon-huntin' en a puffin', en er my blowin' er dis hawn outn de reg'lar 'p'inted time, ter disemble you all tergedder? En w'at is you got on deze yer bran-span-new streaked en striked linzey-woolzey frocks fer, en deze yer new shoes en broganzes en boots, en deze yer new shuts en new hats, en deze yer check muzzle apuns en haid-hankchers,—W'at is hit all fer?

“Lis'n, en I'll lif' yo' wail er ignunce fer you en delighten you wid de un'erstan'in' er de trufe. All dem amongst you dat don' know, en dem er you whar allers knows too

much fer dar own good, kin lis'en fer oncet in dar lifes ez ef dey didn' know nuttin', en kin dar-by show dat on dis day at de leas' dey is had some good bringin' up.

"Well, de wharfo's en de mo'obers en de preambles is jes' dis,—dis, en nuttin' mo' ner nuttin' less. Hit's de buf-day er de bressed Lawd-in-Heaben's li'l' Baby. De bressed Lawd's onlyes' Baby—you year? Hit's de Baby er de gre't Fader in Heaben, whar meked you-all in His Imige, in de ve'y berginnin' on de sixf day er de week, a yeah fo' de firs' Chris'mus day come 'roun'! Yas, He meked you outn de dus' er de ye'th, en gabered up seben bushel baskits full er de frog-meats dat wuz lef' ober atter de multerchude had done en eat all dat dey could stuff.

"Yas, dis day is de bressed Lawd's onlyes' Chile's buf-day,—dough I reckon de Chile mus' er growed considerbul older en considerbul sizerbuler endurin' de time sence den en now. 'Pear lak ter me, too, hit mus' er been a ret good long time ago sence Miss Mary, de holy bressed lady, tuck dat walk ter Befelehem in de night time en gin buf ter de Lawd's onlyes' son,—but de lengf er time endurin' sence den en now hain't needer yer ner needer dar. W'at I wants you all ter do, is ter sto' de 'kazion er dis day away in yo' 'memb'unces.

"Dem whar knows says dar wuz a pow'ful flutterrashun de mawnin' en de ebenin' er de day dat dis preshus li'l' boy-baby wuz bawn ter perdeem

de worl' fum sin en disgreshun. Eben down ter de King wuz pestered 'bout de suckumstances dey said, en de Jews dey wuz 'leckshuneerin' 'roun' 'mong derese'fs en a mekin' speeches en a cussin' en a rarin' en a hollerin' en a flingin' langwidge 'roun' lak dey wuz ebby one er 'em a runnin' fer sheriff, en anudder man had done en got de place.

“En w'ile de Jews wuz in confu'nce, a rarin' derese'fs back in dere cheers en a twis'n er dere merstaches en a puttin' on a'rs lak dey wuz all han's er 'em jesteses er de peace, wid dere hosses all puttin' on a'rs, too, you know, tied on de outside er de cote-house ter de hitchin' pos'es en a pawin' er de groun' en a chompin' er dere bits, en a whick-erin' en a whinien', de seben genteel

wise mens tuck dere night cloze in a bunnel en tuck a nigh cut thoo de by-ways en amble derese'fs off atter sundown. Dey didn' hab no confu'nce, ner mek no bluster ner no terdo 'bout w'at dey wuz up ter. Dey wuz Genteels, en fer one t'ing knowed w'en ter keep dere moufs shet. Dey meant bizness.

"En lo! W'ile de Jews wuz up at de cote-house in seekert sesshun de ghos' got ahaid er 'em, en de moughty Chris'mus wuk wuz done — de eberlastin' fount'ins er de gre't halle-lu-yah wuz onloost wid de ve'y firs' cry er perdempshun w'ich come fum outn dat li'l' hoss-troff in de stable. De echo er salwashun en de uprighteousness er dat cry kibbered de ye'th fum fundament ter foundashun.

“Co’se de Jews say dey didn’ put no ’pendunce in de tale dat dem Genteels wise men tole, en w’at’s mo’, le’me tell you, dem Jews hain’t nebber chawed dere wuds endurin’ de time sence den, needer, ’bout b’leebin’ hit, but all de same, dough, ebbysbody knows dey wuz moughty dumpy ’boutn hit all, en hit suttinly wuz a lesson ter ’em, fer dar hain’t nobody, Jew ner Genteel, ebber kotch a Jew nappin’ sence den; en fuddermo’, nobody hain’t nebber got ahaid er one er ’em, needer, fum dat day ter dis.

“De skeer en confusion wa’n’t all yer on de ye’th, fer dey say de ole Bad Man, too, had a reg’lar harrycane down dar in de Bad Place ’bout hit all.

“Well, Ihain’t ha’f thoo eben wid my firs’ly, en I could go on wid a heap mo’

er de wharfo's, en I hain't eben totch
de preamble ner de mo'obers er dis sus-
picious kazion, but de Missis is a waitin'
en I's 'bleeged ter decease my disco'se,
fer she's done en sont me de answer
th'ee times a'ready ter stop my talkin',
en de fofe time she say I mus' shet up
dis minit; 'sides dat, yo' Mammy Borry
done shuck her haid at me, en you
know when yo' Mammy Borry sheks
her haid hit means bizness, so I's
gwine ter stop ret off lak dey say I
mus', but you year dis, you-all better
'member w'at I tole you. En min',
too, don-chu fling none er yo' sass at
yo' betters, en don-chu git too
familyus wid wunner-nudder, needer.
En fuddermo', 'member dis—dat ebby
single moufful you-all putson de insides
er yo' moufs, en ebby popper you-all

cracks, en ebby coon you-all kotches, en ebbyt'ing dat de w'ite folks gibs you, is kaze hit's de bressed Lawd-in-Heaben's li'l' Baby's buf-day."

My old mammy had dressed me, chattering the while of the mysteries of Santa Claus, of the dangers of his many miles of travel, of the prancing reindeer and of the good things he had hung upon the Christmas tree. "Chris'mus t'ings fer de w'ite en de cullud jes' alak, bofe de same.

"Dis is de way, honey, I yeard dat de bressed Sabyer cometer be de Sabyer er de brack. 'Twuz all on account er a li'l' chile, too, dat He come ter per-deem we-alls wid righteousness en salvation.

"De tale I yeard wuz dat a ole brack man libed 'way up on de side er

a high mountaiu whar de snow lay
'pon de groun' mos' all de yeah 'roun'
en whar dar wa'n't nuttin' 'tall ter eat
'sepn' de ber'es dat growed 'pon de li'l'
bushes en de roots dat growed in de
groun' en de nuts dat drapped offn de
trees.

"De brack man he libed dar lak
he'd been a libin' fer mo' dana hundud
er a t'ousand yeahs. He wuz so ole
dat he wuz all scrooched up wid rheu-
matiz' en his laigs wuz bent en crooked
en his back wuz drawed double. He
wuz so blin' he couldn' skasely see
'sepn' wid one eye, en his han's wuz
ruckled en doubled up wid de miz'ry
so dey looked lak fis'es.

"One night—'twuz Chris'mus Ebe's
night, too, only he nebber knowed
nuttin' 'bout Chris'mus Ebe ner Chris'-

mus gif's ner tuckeys ner pop crackers
ner nuttin' lak dat—he wuz a layin'
down 'pon his pallet tryin' ter see
ef he could stretch out easy w'en
he yeard a li'l' soun' 'way off in de
distance. He lis'en en he lis'en, en ez
he didn' year hit no mo' he wuz gwine
tu'n ober en try ter see ef he couldn'
drap off ter sleep w'en he yeard hit
ag'in. He crope ret up offn his pallet
at de soun' en got his crutches dat he
allers kep' 'longside er 'im so he could
git up mo' easy uver mawnin's.

“Den he hopped ter de do' en stood
a lookin' out at de snow dat kibbered
de groun' en shined in de silber light
er de moon lak sunset on de chutch
winder. 'Way off whar de mountains
retched up ter tetch de sky en de sky
come down ter kiss de mountains wuz

one li'l' styar a shinin' thoo a cloud
lak a flake er snow dat had flewed up
fum de piles 'pon piles er snow dat lay
'pon de groun', en dat cloud wuz de
onlyes' cloud in all dat blue sky.

"Ez he wuz a lookin' at de cloud
en a wonderin' how hit could a got up
dar so high, en w'at meked hit shine
so bret, he yeard dat same soun'
ag'in, en dis time de soun' wuz lak a
li'l' baby a cryin' out. Dough de ole
man had nebber seed a baby, yit all de
same de soun' went ret stret ter his
heart, lak a li'l' baby's cry allers does
w'edder you's ebber yeard one 'fo' er
not. 'Pears lak dar ain't no heart so
unbeknownst ter lub dat hit don' lip
ret outn de breas' w'en hit years de
soun' er dat li'l' soff, piti'ble, feeble
woice er a baby.

“ De ole man lis'en 'twel he got his bearin's stret en den he went out 'a hopplin' on his crutches ober de snow. He fergit all 'boutn his rheumatiz' en his laigs en his back. He 'jes follered dat li'l' wailin' soun' lak he nebber had a ailment in his life. He went 'long 'twel he come ter a place whar a riber runned down de mountain side, a rushin' en a foamin' en a darin' anybody ter cross hit. Dar wa'n't nar' single bridge ner nuttin' dat he could cross ober de riber by. En all de time dat li'l' woice wuz a comin' ter 'im fum de yudder side. He nebber stop ter study. He went 'long 'twel he come ter whar de win' had blowed a tree down 'cross de riber. How dat man ebber crallt wid his crutches en his stiff knees en crumpled up han's

ober dat tree a layin' 'cross dat water
nobody couldn' nebber tell widout de
Lawd hilt out His han's en hope 'im.
En dat's how 'twuz, dough de ole
man didn' know 'twuz de Lawd.

“W'enebber you prays ter de Lawd
ter tek you 'cross any hard place He's
gwine ter do hit sho', en dough de ole
man didn' know he wuz prayin' yit he
wuz prayin' dat ve'y bes' praher dat
ebber wuz prayed in dis worl', en dat
is tryin' ter he'p yudder folks w'ats in
trouble. En I t'ink sometimes dat
dat's de kin' er praher dat de good
Lawd laks de mostes' en dat He crooks
his years en ben's His haid down fum
Heaben ter lis'en ter de quickes'.
Kaze you see a man mos' allers in gin'-
ally gits down on his knees en axes de
Lawd ter gib 'im de t'ings dat b'longs

ter somebody else en ter do de t'ings dat he don' want ter do hisse'f, en he t'inks ef he shobes 'em all off 'pon de Lawd he'll sabe hisse'f a heap er trouble en keep his pocket full er money.

"But dis ole man he didn' say nuttin' ter bodder de Lawd, not knowin' nuttin' 'tall 'bout His bein' up dar on de yudder side er de sky lookin' thoo ter see how much de ole brack man could do by hisse'f, en a comin' in at de las' minit ter he'p'im w'en he needed he'p. He jes' breaved de bref er righteousness down 'pon de ole man, en tuck dat rheumatiz' outn his laigs en all de cranks en miz'ries outn his back en all dat mess er pains 'way fum 'im, en meked 'im ez nimble en limber en spry ez a suckus boy lippin' thoo de rings

wid one foot a ridin' one hoss en de yudder foot ridin' anudder hoss.

“W'en de ole man got ober de riber en look 'roun' he seed a sho-nuff baby a layin' 'pon de snow en cryin', en dough he didn' know w'at a baby wuz, yit he knowed dat hit wuz sump'n dat wuz he'pless en suff'rin'. He tuck hit up in his arms real gentle, en de good Lawd come down ag'in en hope him 'cross dat tree bridge wid dat li'l' chile-baby en hope ter bring 'em bofe safe home ter de ole cabin.

“W'en de baby had had a good swill er nice fresh milk en wuz a layin' peaceabul on de ole man's pallet a sleepin' lak a li'l' baby allers sleeps w'en hit ai'nt hongry en hit ain't got no miz'ry nowhar — de ole man wuz a bendin' ober hit en a wond'rin' w'at

hit wuz anyhow, en howcome hit ter be dar, en a t'inkin' he nebber had seed nuttin' so purty in his whole life; en all ter a suddent w'ile he wuz lookin' de ole cabin lit up lak Chris-mus tar-barr'ls en sky-rockets en pop-crackers had been kindelighted en wuz a bu'nin' en a flarin' en a sparklin', dough hit wuz a diff'unt light, too, fum all dem lights; en a voice said :

“ ‘Dough dy sins be ez skyarlet dey shall be ez w'ite ez de snow you walked thoo dis night ter git dis de leas' one er deze my li'l' ones, en ez dou has' done hit unter dis chile dou has' done hit unter Me; en I am dy Fader en dou art My chile, en My onlyes' Son w'at died fer de worl' is dy Redeemer. Dou en all dy kinlashuns fum dis time on 'twel de gre't day w'en I shall

come ter tek you home ter glory shall
keep de buf-day er my Son whar went
down ter perdeem de worl' fum per-
demption.'

"Yas, li'l' Missis, fum dat day ter
dis de Lawd has been de Heabenly
Fader er de brack man en His Son is
our Sabyer whar come down ter per-
deem us fum de sins er dat firs' man
whar grabbed de apple outn de ooman's
han' atter she'd chunked hit offn de
tree, en tuck en eat hit en hit drawed
his mouf up lak a green persimmon en
pizened bofe him en all his proskerity
atter 'im fum dat time for'ard ter dis
presen' day."

Then my mammy took me down to
the great room known as the office,
where the Christmas tree—"the bound
holly and cedar"—stood in the middle.

of the room, a blaze of dazzling color and light. An immense log fire burned in the huge hearth and shed its genial glow upon the toys and candles and upon the dusky faces of the darkeys who came trooping in with a low courtesy and a gleeful "Chris'mus gif'! Chris'mus gif'!" and a blessing on me, whom our good old Uncle Charles had taken from my mammy and was holding up in his arms towards the lights and the gifts so that I could take down a Christmas present for each one.

Then my beautiful grandmother, with folded hands, smiling at the happy grinning faces around her, impressively reminded them of Him who was born that day to bless them, and how it was all in His Name the Christmas joy and gifts were made.

They all, for their Christmas enjoyment, followed the bent of their own inclinations—molasses and honey pulling, corn-popping and nut-cracking, fireworks and racing, coon and rabbit hunting, — the entrapped “old molly cotton tails” set loose to be recaptured, though this time with a chance of escape and a knowledge of the bliss of freedom,—then the mid-day Christmas dinner, presided over by my black mammy and Uncle Charles.

Later in the day gay jokes and laughter floated across the long table about which our own united family were assembled. How plainly I see the roast pig with the orange in his mouth, “kaze pigs kin hab apples en taters ebby day, but come a Chris’-

mus, co'se eben pigs mus' hab sump'n extry," my mammy explained; and the lurid flames of the plum-pudding still burn brightly in my memory.

The night came beflooded with silver moon-rays—with every breath and ripple of wind in Christmas leash that the softest glee sound might not be broken. The sand-man was on his way. The Christmas gifts had all been distributed—the good things eaten—the egg-nogg had been drunk—melodies and dance-songs and the shuffling and pattering of dancing feet, mingled with the thrum of the banjo, bones and fiddle, floated from the negro quarters to the house.

Soon old mammy and her turban, Uncle Charles and his gold-mounted grinning teeth, the myriad of black

faces, the hand-fed lamb, the goats and dogs, the coons and the rabbits, the peacocks' gorgeous big-eyed tails, and long-whiskered Santa Claus, my dear, beautiful grandmother and the blessed Babe in the manger, all got mixed up and came sliding betwixt the peeping, twinkling stars through the window on a moon-beam into the room—a tangle of shadows—and danced around my trundle bed.

At last, with my tender little heart full of child-love and unwavering faith in my kinfolks,—God and Santa Claus,—my wee, new-born soul borne on, even by this first Christmas influence, to higher sentiments of love, adoration, faith and spiritual sympathy, my Christmas dolly clasped close in my arms in the sweetness and strength of

that first subtle instinct, the blessed, sacred peace of motherhood, my lips wreathed in mysterious smiles, I laughed—and—a-n-d—a-n-d—Christmas was over.

* * * * *

Over and gone now are all my childhood's merry Christmas days. The tree with its beautiful burden of gifts and brilliant lights has withered away and died, to become a perennial growth shining in inextinguishable glory in memory.

Uncle Charles closed his eyes upon the world long ago, but how often, even now, do I feel his strong clasp lifting me over the rough places in the pathway of life and holding me aloft, where I can see the lights and gifts on the Tree of Life.

My quaint, kind old mammy rocked me to sleep for the last time away back in my childhood, but even yet I seem to feel her loving arms hold me to her bosom and chafe my tired feet.

The lovely face of my grandmother passed away from my sight years ago, but when has there been a moment that it has not dwelt in the depths of my heart ?

All gone, and I stand alone and look upward at a great white star shining high in heaven, the brightest and most beautiful of all the luminous globes in the wide expanse of radiant sky.

I wonder if it is the Star that shone over the shepherds who watched their flocks by night. I fix my eyes upon it with a longing that will not be denied. It seems to draw nearer and

nearer, and to shine upon me with a tender glow. How large and softly radiant it is. It sends down to me long, brilliant rays, like beautiful white hands beckoning with irresistible love.

It widens and deepens, as if to fill all the world with light. It bends over me with a tender pity. It grows yet more intensely radiant and seems to open wide and form a doorway to heaven. The illimitable space glows with supernal light. Through the open doorway I see all the joys that I have lost on earth. All the dear, dead Christmas days of my happy childhood, the pets and playmates of my sweetly-remembered past, the loved and loving faces that have gone with me in memory through all my

life, good Uncle Charles, dear, dainty
Mammy Borry and my own kind old
mammy, and my grandmother's dear,
sweet face, lovely as in the old days,
all come to greet me on this Christmas
night. Above the portal I see in starry
letters the sweet inscription, "*God is
Love!*"



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